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PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,

BEING

PAPERS READ BEFORE THE

R.I.  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 1.

I.S.  
Nos 1-10  
1872-79

"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.

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PERSONAL NARRATIVES

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OF THE

BATTLES OF THE REBELLION.

No. 1.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN

OF THE

SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

BY

ELIJAH H. RHODES.

THE  
NEWBERRY



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

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THERE have now been issued three numbers of the series of "PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF THE BATTLES OF THE REBELLION," under the auspices of the "Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society," as follows:—

- NO. 1. THE FIRST CAMPAIGN OF THE SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY. BY ELISHA H. RHODES.
- NO. 2. THE RHODE ISLAND ARTILLERY AT THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN. BY J. ALBERT MONROE.
- NO. 3. REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE IN THE FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY. BY GEORGE N. BLISS.

These papers embrace reminiscences of the three arms of the service—Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry—and are intended as specimens of the series, succeeding numbers of which will be issued if these succeed. The editions have been limited to 250 copies, and the price fixed at 25 cents per copy.

PROVIDENCE, July 29, 1876.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES

OF THE

BATTLES OF THE REBELLION

No. 3.

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REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE

IN THE

FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY.

BY

CAPT. GEORGE N. BLISS.



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Rhode Island soldiers and sailors historical society.

Personal narratives of events in the war of the rebellion, being papers read before the Rhode Island soldiers and sailors historical society ... [1st]-7th ser. Providence, The Society etc. 1878-1915.

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No more published.

(Continued on next card)

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LIST OF PAPERS  
IN THE FIRST SERIES OF  
PERSONAL NARRATIVES.

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- No. 1. THE FIRST CAMPAIGN OF THE SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY. By Gen. ELISHA H. RHODES.
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- No. 4. MY FIRST CRUISE AT SEA AND THE LOSS OF THE IRON-CLAD MONITOR. By FRANK B. BUTTS, late Paymaster's Clerk, U. S. N.
- No. 5. KIT CARSON'S FIGHT WITH THE COMANCHE AND KIOWA INDIANS. By Capt. GEORGE H. PETTIS.
- No. 6. A TRIP TO RICHMOND AS A PRISONER OF WAR. By EDWARD P. TOBIE (late Second Lieutenant First Maine Cavalry.)
- No. 7. INCIDENTS OF CAVALRY SERVICE IN LOUISIANA. By Col. CHARLES H. PARKHURST.
- No. 8. THE BAY FIGHT. A SKETCH OF THE BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY. By Wm. F. HUTCHINSON, M. D., late Surgeon U. S. Navy.
- No. 9. PERSONAL INCIDENTS IN THE EARLY CAMPAIGNS OF THE THIRD REGIMENT RHODE ISLAND VOLUNTEERS. By Col. EDWIN METCALF.
- No. 10. THE BATTLE OF THE MINE. By Capt. ERVIN T. CASE.



THE FIRST CAMPAIGN  
OF THE  
SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

BY

ELISHA H. RHODES,

(Late Lieutenant-Colonel Commanding Second Rhode Island Infantry  
Brevet Colonel United States Volunteers.)



PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

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A few years since, it occurred to some of the comrades residing in this city, who served in the United States Army and Navy during the war of the rebellion, to form themselves into an association under the name of the "Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society," for the purpose of collecting, as far as they were able, documents concerning the civil war, and of putting on record some of the unwritten history of that contest, in the hope that their labors might, perhaps, be of value to the future historian. As a part of the means to this end, these comrades have, from time to time, written and read before the Society papers treating of their own experiences and recollections of notable events as they saw them. In the belief that these papers will be pleasant reading for all who were interested in the great conflict, and contain many facts of historical value, as well as tend to keep alive memories of patriotism, bravery and self-sacrifice. It is proposed to publish them in a series of pamphlets uniform in size and style for preservation. The initial number, *The Campaign of the Second Rhode Island Infantry by Colonel Rhodes*, is here presented. It was read before the Society, November 3rd, 1875, and was the first one of the series. Others are in preparation and will speedily follow.

PROVIDENCE, July, 1878.



THE FIRST CAMPAIGN  
OF THE  
SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

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UPON the call of the President of the United States, in the Spring of 1861, for troops to serve for the period of three years, measures were taken to organize a regiment to be known as the Second Rhode Island Volunteers. It was my fortune to be one of the first to volunteer for service as a soldier in this command, and I propose to relate in plain and simple language, my experience during the first few weeks of the war, including a description of the First Battle of Bull Run, as seen from the standpoint of an enlisted man. I am aware that I have selected a difficult subject, as perhaps no campaign of the War of the Rebellion has given rise to more contradictory statements and reports than the one I shall



attempt to describe this evening. In the excited state of the people at this time, and in the absence of a proper appreciation of military affairs, skirmishes were magnified into battles, and the highest importance was attached to events that in after years were considered of very little if of any consequence. If in the course of my paper I am obliged to frequently refer to myself, I know you will excuse me when you remember that this paper is a personal narrative, a record of what I saw and felt, and not a history of general events.

I enlisted at the armory of the First Light Infantry Company, in Providence, R. I., and assisted in organizing a company composed of about one hundred and forty men, which command, after being properly officered, was tendered to Colonel John S. Slocum as part of the regiment to be raised. The number of recruits offered from all parts of the State was largely in excess of the number required, and rendered it necessary that some organizations should be declined, and as the Infantry had already sent two companies into the First Rhode Island Detached Militia, our company was ordered to disband, much to our



disappointment. Twenty-five men, however, were selected from our ranks and assigned to a company commanded by Captain William H. P. Steere. My name was included in the number selected, and I suddenly found myself changed from an "Infantry" man to a "National Cadet." This company was mustered into the United States service as Company "D," June 5th, 1861, in a building on Eddy street, Providence, and ranked fourth in the regimental formation. Uniforms were issued, consisting of the so-called "Rhode Island blouse," grey pants, and hats looped up at the side.

On the seventh of June the first parade was made and the regiment proceeded to Exchange Place and there listened to an official announcement of the death of the Honorable Stephen A. Douglas. On the eighth the regiment went into camp on Dexter Training Ground, which was named in honor of the Colonel of the First Rhode Island Detached Militia, "Camp Burnside." Sibley tents were issued and our camp life began. Our company being unable to procure tents passed the first night in a carpenter shop on the corner of Cranston and Gilmore Streets. One member



of the regiment was drummed out of camp to the tune of the rogue's march, creating quite a sensation not only in the camp but among the citizens of the city. I remember that we made several parades, and on one occasion attended Divine service at Grace Church and were addressed by Rt. Rev. Bishop Clark. The colors which the regiment carried into the field were presented by the ladies of Providence, June twelfth, by the hands of Hon. Jabez C. Knight, Mayor, and the scene was one long remembered by the men.

A battery of light artillery, armed with James twelve pounder guns, had been organized, and under command of Captain William H. Reynolds was attached to the regiment. This battery was known afterwards as "Battery A, First Rhode Island Light Artillery," and at the close of the Bull Run campaign was detached from the regiment.

Rumors of our intended departure for the seat of war had become numerous, but for reasons best known to the authorities our breaking camp was delayed until June nineteenth, when tents were struck, baggage and knapsacks packed, and the regiment



moved out of camp, and marching by way of High, Westminster and South Main Streets, took the steamer State of Maine near Fox Point. The Battery embarked upon the steamer Kill-von-kull. The streets were crowded with people, and we left the wharf amid the tearful farewells and cheers of our friends. Rations of bread and salt beef were served on board the transport, and we had our first taste of army fare, having lived sumptuously while encamped in Providence. The novelty of the trip banished sleep from our eyes, and we passed the night indulging in such mild demonstrations as military discipline would permit. By early morning we were in New York, and after touching at the wharf for orders, we steamed away to Elizabeth, New Jersey, where we landed and took the cars for Baltimore *via* York and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. All day we slowly rolled along the track and on the afternoon of the twenty-first found ourselves in the vicinity of Baltimore.

Rumors had been heard along the route that an attack was to be made upon us while marching through Baltimore, and the excitement in the regi-



ment ran high. Three ball cartridges were issued to each man in the cars, and as we had the old style of flint-lock gun, altered to percussion, we found each cartridge to contain three buck shot in addition to the ball. Most of the men carried revolvers, although strict orders had been issued against the practice. In the search which was made by the officers for concealed weapons, I managed (as most of the boys did) to save mine from capture. It was dark when we disembarked at Baltimore and we found the streets crowded with people. Strict orders had been given us to answer no questions and hold no conversation with any one. Silently we slung our knapsacks, and taking our places in line began the march. Cheers for Jeff. Davis were given by the crowd on the sidewalks, and some abuse was heaped upon us, but we kept on our march, ready to repel an attack. My knapsack contained a load sufficient for a dozen men, and with aching back I tramped on, not daring to stop for fear of the crowd. As I look back upon this short march, I remember it as one of the most fatiguing ones I ever experienced. But I learned a useful lesson: never to put more in a knapsack than I could comfortably carry.



After taking the cars for Washington we heard many rumors of intentions to run us off the track, which kept the men on the alert, and fears of an attack caused sleep to be out of the question. It seems strange now to think of our alarm, but at the time it was dangers unseen, more than seen, that troubled us.

On the morning of June twenty-second the regiment arrived in Washington, and we had our first view of the Capitol. Forming column, we marched out New York Avenue, a distance of about three miles, to Gale's Woods, where we found a camp adjoining the barracks occupied by the First Rhode Island Detached Militia. Our camp was called "Camp Clark," in honor of Bishop Clark, who accompanied us to Washington. The boys of the First Rhode Island greeted us with hearty cheers, and we were soon made at home in their comfortable quarters.

The next few weeks were passed in perfecting our discipline and knowledge of a soldier's duty. Our camp was a centre of attraction for the Washington people, and the evening parades of both regiments were witnessed by thousands. The parades were



held in the camp of the First Regiment, the Colonels alternating in command. Rumors of intended movements were continually reaching camp, and every skirmish in Virginia was magnified into a battle. While stationed at "Camp Clark" we experienced little, if any, of the unpleasant and disagreeable part of a soldier's life. Rations were issued in bulk to both regiments, and cooked under the supervision of the commissary of the First Rhode Island. The daily fare consisted of roast beef and plum pudding for dinner, while the morning and evening meals were more like what one would expect to find at home, rather than in the army. I remember well our disgust at receiving, just before we started on the Bull Run march, an issue of army rations composed of hard tack and salt pork.

On the eighteenth day of July we broke camp and moved out into New York avenue, where we found the brigade to which we were assigned, which up to this time we had known only in name. The brigade consisted of the First and Second Rhode Island Volunteers, the Second New Hampshire Volunteers and the Seventy-first New York Militia, the whole un-



der command of the senior Colonel, Ambrose E. Burnside. Excitement ran high in the streets, and as we moved through the city we were loudly cheered by the people. Crossing the Potomac, by Long Bridge, we took the road to Fairfax Court House. It being late when we crossed the river, only a short march was made, and we halted for the night at Annandale. This was our first experience in sleeping without tents and by camp fires. Rails were soon collected and immense fires started, we imagining this to be the correct thing for soldiers to do, although on a hot July night.

Early the next morning, the nineteenth, we resumed the march. Co. "D," Captain Steere, was detailed as flankers, and we started off with little, if any, idea of our duty or danger. I remember we found an old railroad embankment covered with blackberry bushes, and the entire company stopped and ate their fill. This march partook more of the character of a pleasant ramble than that of an armed force looking for an enemy. About noon, in company with two other men, I found myself on the summit of a hill, and looking back to our left and rear I saw the



spires of a town that we had passed unnoticed. I reported the fact to Captain Steere, and with his glass we decided that it must be Fairfax. Captain Steere formed his company into a square, and in this manner we entered the town by a side street and below the Court House. The rebels, in their haste, had left many articles lying in the streets, and if we had not been restrained by the good sense of our Captain, we should have loaded ourselves with the useless trumpery.

Halting in the main street we were soon joined by the head of our regiment, that came in by the main road. The rebel flag was taken down and the Stars and Stripes raised by one of our men. It fell to our lot to be placed in camp in the grounds of a mansion which had been occupied by the rebel commanding general. In looking about the house I found among some loose papers a subsistence return, showing the number of men to whom rations had been issued the day before. I gave the paper to Captain Nelson Viall and he sent it to army headquarters. The passion for pillage broke out, but was quickly suppressed, though many ludicrous



scenes occurred. I remember one man entering camp with a Bible under one arm and an immense engraving of the Father of his Country under the other. An officer obliged him to restore the articles to the house. A piano, from which the strings had been taken, served as a cupboard for some of the boys. The inhabitants had fled and we had the town all to ourselves.

On the twentieth we left Fairfax Court House and encamped a few miles beyond, near Centreville. Here we built shelters with pine and cedar boughs, and this camp is known to this day as "Bush Camp" by the men of the Second Rhode Island Volunteers. Here we heard our first hostile shot, and although at a distance, yet it served to impress us with what was likely to follow.

About two o'clock, on the morning of July twenty-first, we left "Bush Camp," and marching down the hill, through Centreville, found the roads obstructed by wagons and troops that had failed to start on time. Soon the Second left the main road and struck off to the right, through a wood path that had been much obstructed. As we led the brigade the task of



and the rebel artillery was delivering upon us its heaviest fire, Dwight would step aside from the smoke from his gun, and seemed perfectly absorbed by the sublime and magnificent spectacle. Once or twice he called my attention to the glorious scene, but I was too much engaged and my mind was too much occupied in thinking how we were to get out of the "glorious scene" to take much pleasure in the observance of it. Dwight was associated with me, more or less, during the whole war, and I found in his character more admirable qualities than I ever found possessed by any other man, and the objectionable qualities of his nature I could never discover. War had no terrors for him, and his æsthetic taste found beauties to admire even under the most adverse circumstances. When the leaden rain and iron hail were thickest, I have known him to muse upon philosophy, and to repeat a quotation from some favorite author applicable to the situation and circumstances. He was quick and unerring, and no emergency could arise that would deprive him of his full self-possession. This is digressing from my subject, but my admiration for him was such, that I



feel justified in thus alluding to a life that was practically lost in the war, though his death did not take place until within the past year.

About one or two hours after the engagement began, Captain Reynolds, with Lieutenants Tompkins and Weeden, went off to the right of our position with two guns, which were placed in position near the Doogan House, I think, where they went earnestly at work. During their absence, Sergeant John H. Hammond, of my section, reported to me that he was entirely out of ammunition, and as I knew that there was no reserve supply for the James gun within available distance, I directed him to take his piece to the rear, to some safe place and wait for orders. I remained with my other piece and the pieces of Lieutenant Vaughn. Either before or after this, a shot from the enemy struck the axle of one of the pieces, which entirely disabled it.\* The gun

\*At the conclusion of the reading of this paper, Governor Sprague and William A. Sabin, formerly a member of the battery, gave it as their recollection that the stock of the gun carriage broke on account of the extreme elevation of the gun, and that it was not hit by the enemy's shot; but a letter of mine, written after the battle, implies that the gun carriage was struck by a shot.



but was unable to lift him from the ground. Calling for help, Private Parker (mentioned above) dropped his gun and came to my assistance. Together we bore him to a small house on the left of the line and laying him upon the floor, sent for Colonel Burnside, Surgeon Francis L. Wheaton and Chaplain Thorndike Jameson, who all arrived in a few moments, a lull in the fight having occurred. Chaplain Augustus Woodbury and Assistant Surgeon James Harris, of the First Rhode Island Detached Militia, were already in attendance. With the sponge, from my cap, I washed the blood from his head and found that the bullet had ploughed a furrow from rear to front through the top of his head, but had not lodged. His ankle (I cannot call to mind which one) was also injured, having two wounds upon it. While unable to speak, yet he appeared conscious, and at my request would remove his hand from his wounded head. When it was decided to place the Colonel in an ambulance, I took a door from its hinges with my gun screw driver, and assisted in carrying him on this door to the ambulance. Colonel Slocum, as is well known, fell into the hands of the enemy and died of his injuries.



But to go back to the battle, the Second Regiment was engaged about thirty minutes without support, when the balance of the brigade was brought on to the field and the battle became general. The Eighth Georgia regiment was in our immediate front, and received the benefit of our fire. We had a tradition in our regiment until the close of the war, that the Second Rhode Island nearly annihilated this Georgia regiment. Since the close of the war, I have seen a paper, written and printed in the South, which gives the Second Rhode Island the credit of having broken up and destroyed the Eighth Georgia so completely that it had to be reorganized. Shot and shell were continually striking in or near our line and the troops became much scattered. Losing my own company I joined Company F, under command of Lieutenant William B. Sears, and remained with them until the battle ceased and we withdrew to replenish our ammunition.

About three o'clock in the afternoon the enemy disappeared in our front and the firing ceased. We considered that a victory had been won. The wounded were cared for and then orders came for us



and the spreading roots for fuel, doing the work so thoroughly that it would have been difficult to have found a root as large as a man's finger in the ground which had a few months before been covered with the vigorous growth of the forest. Certainly no land was ever more effectually cleared for the plow, but how the owners of the soil managed to re-establish their boundary lines, with every fence, tree and landmarks generally destroyed for miles in all directions, puzzles the imagination.

On the seventeenth day of August, 1864, orders were issued for the destruction of all the wheat and hay south of a line from Millwood to Winchester and Petticoat Gap in the Valley of the Shenandoah, Virginia, and for the seizure of all mules, horses and cattle that might be useful to the army. Shenandoah means, in the Indian language, "daughter of the stars"—a name well merited by the bright silvery waters of this mountain stream, flowing through one of the most beautiful valleys in the world, with a soil so fertile as to have gained for it the name of "the garden of Virginia." This seventeenth day of August, 1864, was a perfect summer day; not a



cloud obscured the pathway of the sun; the mountain peaks were clearly outlined against the horizon, while all the level lowland seemed smiling with the well-filled barns and huge stacks of an abundant harvest. Such was the scene upon which the sun rose, but soon the wasting flames were seen blazing in all directions; barns, cribs and stacks soon changed to dust and ashes; women and children, with tears streaming down their wretched cheeks, begged the stern soldiers to spare them the food necessary to keep them from starving in the fast approaching winter. It was pitiful, but the soldiers could not spare; their hard duty was to obey orders. It is estimated that, upon this single day, enough of the finest wheat in the world to subsist a hundred thousand men for a year was destroyed, and that in a few weeks twenty-five million dollars worth of property was swept from the face of the valley under this order. Never did man pen more truthful words than General Sherman's famous sentence, "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it."

On many a night when the cavalry halted for a camp, in every regiment could be heard the orders,



protect the retreat. We passed through their ranks, and entered our old grounds, "Bush Camp," supposing the retreat to be at an end.

Tired, hungry and wet, we laid down, only to be awakened about eleven o'clock that night to resume the march towards Washington, in the midst of a rain storm. The regiment filed out of camp and marched to Fairfax Court House, in good order and rested in the streets. Crowds of soldiers were hurrying by and the streets were blocked with trains. After halting a few minutes we started again and soon, in the darkness, rain and crowd, became broken up to some extent. Of the horrors of that night, I can give you no adequate idea. I suffered untold horrors from thirst and fatigue, but struggled on, clinging to my gun and cartridge box. Many times I sat down in the mud determined to go no further, and willing to die to end my misery. But soon a friend would pass and urge me to make another effort, and I would stagger on a mile further. At daylight we could see the spires of Washington, and a welcome sight it was. About eight o'clock I reached Fort Runyon, near Long Bridge, and giving



my gun to an officer, who was collecting them, I entered a tent and was soon asleep. Towards noon I awoke and, with my company, endeavored to cross Long Bridge, but fell exhausted before reaching the Washington side. My officers kindly placed me in an army wagon and I was carried to camp, where, after rest and proper care, I soon recovered and went on duty.

The loss of the regiment in this disastrous affair was ninety-three killed, wounded and missing. Of this number, four officers were killed, namely, Colonel John S. Slocum, Major Sullivan Ballou, Captain Levi Tower and Captain S. James Smith. Twenty-six enlisted men were killed or mortally wounded. My Company, "D," lost four killed, three wounded, one of whom died, and one missing.

Duyekinek, in his History of the Rebellion, makes the following mention of the regiment and the part it took in this battle:

"The history of the Second Rhode Island Volunteers may be cited as an example of those to whom Bull Run was no disgrace. They were near the extreme right in the engagement. Their previous march had been as fatiguing as that of others; they



were as badly off for food as others, having nothing but a few crackers to eat for more than thirty-six hours. They were the first to engage, were severely engaged, as long as or longer than any others; they were badly cut up, losing their Colonel and other officers, and sixteen per cent. of their ranks killed. (This should be sixteen per cent. killed and wounded.) They stood firm under fire while the panic stricken crowd swept by and through them, and until they received the order to retreat. They then wheeled steadily into column and marched in good order, until the road was obstructed by overturned wagons. Here they were badly broken up by a cannonade, scattered and disorganized, but afterwards having mainly collected at Centreville, reformed and marched the same night, under such of their officers as remained alive, to and through Washington, to a position several miles to the northward—a post of danger—where they at once resumed regular camp duties. When visited, a few days afterwards, by an inspector, he was told and led to believe that the men only wanted a day's rest to be ready and willing to advance again upon the enemy. He reported the regiment not demoralized."



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No. 2.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



# THE RHODE ISLAND ARTILLERY

AT THE

## FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN.

BY

J. ALBERT MONROE,

(Late Lieutenant-Colonel First Rhode Island Light Artillery.)



PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



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1878.



THE RHODE ISLAND ARTILLERY  
AT THE  
FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN.

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WHEN the first call for troops, to serve for the term of three months, was made by President Lincoln, in 1861, for the purpose of suppressing the rebellion, which had assumed most dangerous proportions to the National Government, the Marine Artillery, of this city, responded cheerfully to the call, and under the command of Captain Charles H. Tompkins, left Providence, April eighteenth, for the seat of war.

The senior officer of the company, who remained at home, was Captain William H. Parkhurst, then book-keeper at the Mechanics Bank on South Main Street. Before the company was fairly away, I called upon him and suggested the propriety of call-



ing a meeting to organize a new company to take the place of the one that had gone. The suggestion met his views, and he at once published a notice that a meeting for the purpose would be held that evening at the armory of the Marines, on Benefit Street. The meeting was largely attended, and comprised among its numbers a great many of our most intelligent and influential citizens. A large number of names were enrolled that night as members of the new company, and arrangements were made to have the armory open daily, for the purpose of obtaining additional signatures to the roll of membership. In a few days some three hundred names were obtained, and every man whose name was enrolled seemed to take the greatest interest in having the work proceed.

By general consent, rather than by appointment or election, I assumed the duty of conducting the drills and of reducing matters to a system. It was supposed at the time that the force already called into the field, consisting of seventy-five thousand men, would be amply sufficient to effectually quell the disturbance that had arisen at the South, but



there appeared to be in the minds of all the men who gathered at the Marines' Armory, a quiet determination to go to the assistance of those who had already gone, should they appear to need aid. The call for men to serve for the period of three years put a new phase upon matters. Those whose private business was of such importance that absence from home that length of time would injure the interests of others as well as their own, withdrew, leaving more than a sufficient number to man a full battery. From that time drilling of the men proceeded uninterruptedly both day and night. A greater number than the capacity of the armory would admit of drilling at one time, presented themselves daily. Many of the evenings were spent in taking the men out on the streets and to vacant lots near by, exercising them in marching drill. Through the influence of Governor Sprague the company was furnished with a complete battery of twelve pounder James guns, which arrived here some time in May, I think, and then the drills became spirited in exercise in the manual of the piece, mechanical manœuvres, as well as in marching.



About the first of June Lieutenant William H. Reynolds and First Sergeant Thomas F. Vaughn of the three months battery, were appointed Captain and First Lieutenant respectively, and J. Albert Monroe, John A. Tompkins and William B. Weeden were appointed Second, Third and Fourth Lieutenants, and they were so commissioned. The commissions should have been one captain, two first lieutenants and two second lieutenants, but there was so little knowledge of just the right way to do things at that time, that this error occurred, and it was not until after the First Battle of Bull Run that it was corrected.

On the sixth of June, 1861, the company was mustered into the United States service by Colonel S. Loomis of the United States Army, for the period of "three years unless sooner discharged," in a large room of a building on Eddy street.

On the eighth of June, the regular business of soldier's life began by the company going into camp on Dexter Training Ground. The time was occupied in detachment and battery drills until the nineteenth of the month, when the guns, carriages, and the horses



also, if my memory serves me, were embarked on the steamer Kill-von-Kull, at the Fox Point wharf. The steamer landed at Elizabethport, New Jersey, where the battery and men were transferred to cars. The train left Elizabethport about four o'clock in the afternoon. The journey to Washington was a most tedious one. Harrisburg was not reached until the next morning, and it was not until the following morning that the train arrived in Washington.

Although the journey was a long one, and tiresome, many incidents transpired to relieve the tedium of the trip. At Baltimore, which was passed through in the evening, every man was on the *qui vive*, with nerves strung to the tension, so great was the fear that an attack might be made upon us. Every one who had a revolver carried it cocked. A corporal, who is now a commissioned officer in the regular army, remarked to me that he never was in such danger in his life, though nothing had occurred to awaken a sense of danger, except that a small pebble was thrown, probably by some boys, that hit one of the gun carriages on the flat car, upon which he and I were riding. The next day rebel flags, in imagina-



tion, were frequently discovered while passing through Maryland.

On our arrival at Washington, the morning of the twenty-second, we were cordially greeted by Captain Tompkins of the three months battery, and he and his men lent us every assistance in their power. The company went into camp in Gale's woods, with the Second Regiment Rhode Island Infantry, and adjoining were the camps of the three months organizations—the First Regiment Rhode Island Detached Militia and the First Battery. The ground occupied by the three months men was already known as "Camp Sprague;" the ground occupied by the Second Battery and the Second Regiment was named "Camp Clark," in honor of Bishop Thomas M. Clark, who had taken a great interest in the raising and the organization of troops in Rhode Island.

Affairs went along more smoothly than could reasonably have been expected from men just taken from the pursuits of civil life. Captain Reynolds, with rare tact, won the confidence of all his men and officers. Section and battery drills took place daily,



## THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN. 11

in the morning, and the afternoons were generally spent at standing gun drill.

On the ninth of July, while at section drill, a sad accident occurred, by which Corporal Morse (Nathan T.) and private Bourne (William E.) lost their lives, and private Freeman (Edward R.) was very seriously injured. From some unaccountable cause the limber chest upon which they were mounted exploded, almost instantly killing Morse and Bourne and severely injuring Freeman. The remains of Morse and Bourne were escorted to the depot by the company, and there was extended to them a marked tribute of respect upon their arrival and burial at home.

On the sixteenth of July the battery left Camp Clark at half past one o'clock in the morning, with the First and Second Rhode Island Regiments, but it was broad daylight before the command got fairly away from the vicinity of the camp. Under the lead of Colonel Ambrose E. Burnside, who had command of the Second New Hampshire, Seventy-first New York, First and Second Rhode Island Regiments and the battery, as a brigade, the company marched over



Long Bridge to a point about ten miles from Washington, where the whole brigade bivouacked for the night. The next morning the march was resumed at day-break, and Fairfax Court House was reached about half past one in the afternoon. The battery was parked and the company went into camp near the Court House, on the ground and near the residence\* of a Mr. Stephenson, an English gentleman with a large and interesting family, every member of which appeared to do their utmost to promote our comfort. Early the next morning, Thursday the eighteenth, the advance again began and continued with numerous delays until near night-fall, when camp was established near Centreville, on the plantation of a Mr. Utteback.

On the morning of Sunday the twenty-first the brigade broke camp and commenced the march towards Manassas. The march was a tedious and lonely one until daybreak. The morning broke as clear and lovely as any that ever opened upon Virginia soil. In the early daylight it seemed to dawn upon the minds of both officers and men, that they were there for a fixed purpose, and that the actual



business of their vocation was to commence. Previously, nearly all had thought that upon the approach of the United States troops, with their splendid equipment and the vast resources behind them, the "rebel mob," as it was deemed, but which we afterwards learned to respect as the rebel forces, would flee from their position and disperse.

General Hunter's column, to which Colonel Burnside's brigade was attached, was the right of the advancing line, and soon after sunrise the report of heavy guns to the left told us that the work of the day had commenced. Steadily, however, the column pushed on, but with frequent halts, until Sudley Church was reached, where a short stop was made in the shade of the thick foliage of the trees in the vicinity of the church. The battery was following the Second Rhode Island, a portion of which were deployed as skirmishers, and contrary to the custom of throwing them, the skirmishers, well in advance, they moved directly on the flanks of the column. Suddenly the outposts of the enemy opened fire, which, to our inexperienced ears, sounded like the explosion



of several bunches of fire crackers. Immediately after came the order, "FORWARD YOUR BATTERY!" Although the order was distinctly heard by both officers and men of the battery, I have never believed that it was definitely known whether it was given by General McDowell or General Hunter. With most commendable promptness, but without that caution which a battery commander learns to observe only by experience, Captain Reynolds rushed his battery forward at once at a sharp gallop. The road at this point was skirted by woods, but a short distance beyond, the battery emerged upon an open field, and at once went into position and opened fire.

The battery was now considerably in advance of the infantry and could easily have been captured and taken from the field by the enemy, before the supporting infantry were formed in line of battle; and two years later under the same circumstances, the entire battery would have been lost; but neither side hardly understood the rudiments of the art of war. When we reached the open field the air seemed to be filled with myriads of serpents, such was the sound of the bullets passing through it. Above us



and around us on every side, they seemed to be hissing, writhing and twisting. I have been under many a hot fire, but I don't think that, in nearly four years experience, I ever heard so many bullets in such a short space of time. Suddenly thrown into a position, the realities of which had been only feebly imagined and underestimated, it is surprising that all did so well. I remember the first thing that came into my mind was the wish that I was at home out of danger's way, and immediately following came the sense of my obligation to perform every duty of the position that I filled. The same spirit seemed to animate every man of the battery, and each and every one worked manfully throughout the day.

Hardly had we arrived on the field, when with almost the rapidity of lightning it passed from one to another that Sergeant George E. Randolph was wounded. He was a great favorite with the entire company, his personal qualities being such as to win the respect and love of all. Although every one felt that a dark cloud had thrown its shadow over us, still there was no faltering. Captain Reynolds, who had marked affection for Sergeant Randolph,



sacrificed the impulses of his nature and stuck to his command to look out for the interests of all.

A great many amusing incidents occurred during the first hour of the action, that, undoubtedly, have afforded many hours of enjoyment to the partakers. Two of the corporals seemed to find great relief in getting behind a limber-chest with its cover opened, though they pluckily performed their duties, and I confess that I experienced a similar relief myself when I was obliged to go there once or twice to examine the ammunition, though I fully realized that it was like a quail running his head into a snowbank to escape the hunter.

The firing was exceedingly rapid, every one appearing to feel that the great object was to make as much noise as possible, and get an immense quantity of iron into the enemy's line in the shortest possible space of time, without regard to whether it hit anything or not. The firing was principally directed towards the smoke of a rebel battery, posted near what is shown as the "Henry House" on the map accompanying General McDowell's report of the action, but was really the "Lewis House,"



which house served as the headquarters of General Beauregard. But very little attention was paid to the effect of the shot for some time. Considerable of the fire was directed into a clump of woods in our immediate front, in which was quite a force of rebel infantry, and I have reason to believe that this fire was very effective; for, upon visiting the spot during the action of the Second Bull Run I found the trees thickly scarred at the height where the shot would be likely to do the most execution.

We had with us a young man, who was hardly more than a mere boy, by the name of Henry H. Stewart, who had been taken out from here by Captain Reynolds to act as an orderly and guidon, who, while nearly every one else was excited and everything was in confusion, preserved, apparently, the utmost coolness, moving from point to point as calmly as if performing the ordinary duties of parade, and it was not until I ordered him so to do that he dismounted from his horse. But the coolest one of our number, and, I believe, the coolest man on the field that day, was Sergeant G. Lyman Dwight. When the storm of bullets was thickest



and the rebel artillery was delivering upon us its heaviest fire, Dwight would step aside from the smoke from his gun, and seemed perfectly absorbed by the sublime and magnificent spectacle. Once or twice he called my attention to the glorious scene, but I was too much engaged and my mind was too much occupied in thinking how we were to get out of the "glorious scene" to take much pleasure in the observance of it. Dwight was associated with me, more or less, during the whole war, and I found in his character more admirable qualities than I ever found possessed by any other man, and the objectionable qualities of his nature I could never discover. War had no terrors for him, and his æsthetic taste found beauties to admire even under the most adverse circumstances. When the leaden rain and iron hail were thickest, I have known him to muse upon philosophy, and to repeat a quotation from some favorite author applicable to the situation and circumstances. He was quick and unerring, and no emergency could arise that would deprive him of his full self-possession. This is digressing from my subject, but my admiration for him was such, that I



feel justified in thus alluding to a life that was practically lost in the war, though his death did not take place until within the past year.

About one or two hours after the engagement began, Captain Reynolds, with Lieutenants Tompkins and Weeden, went off to the right of our position with two guns, which were placed in position near the Doogan House, I think, where they went earnestly at work. During their absence, Sergeant John H. Hammond, of my section, reported to me that he was entirely out of ammunition, and as I knew that there was no reserve supply for the James gun within available distance, I directed him to take his piece to the rear, to some safe place and wait for orders. I remained with my other piece and the pieces of Lieutenant Vaughn. Either before or after this, a shot from the enemy struck the axle of one of the pieces, which entirely disabled it.\* The gun

\*At the conclusion of the reading of this paper, Governor Sprague and William A. Sabin, formerly a member of the battery, gave it as their recollection that the stock of the gun carriage broke on account of the extreme elevation of the gun, and that it was not hit by the enemy's shot; but a letter of mine, written after the battle, implies that the gun carriage was struck by a shot.



was dismounted and slung under its limber and immediately taken from the field. The mechanical manœuvres that the men had been exercised in before they left home, for the first time now found opportunity for practical application, and the slinging of the piece was performed as thoroughly as upon the floor of the drill-room.

Sometime after mid-day Governor Sprague, accompanied by Captain Reynolds, rode up to me and said, "Monroe, can't you get your guns over on the hill there, where those batteries are?" The batteries referred to were those of Captains Ricketts and Griffin, which were then in position near the "Henry" or "Lewis" House. Without any thought, except to take the pieces to that position, I ordered my remaining piece and one of Lieutenant Vaughn's forward, and accompanied by Captain Reynolds proceeded across the turnpike and up the road leading to the place where the two batteries were in position. The day was a very hot one, and I remember that my thirst, at this time, was almost unendurable. Crossing the turnpike, I saw a pool of muddy water which appeared like the watering places beside our



New England country roads, where they are crossed by rivulets or brooks. Although the water was muddy and the dead bodies of a man and a horse were lying in it, so great was my thirst, I could not resist the inclination to dismount to slake it, and did so. Quickly remounting, I went forward with the section through what appeared to be a lane, on a side hill, which was completely filled with infantry, who had been hotly engaged in the fight since the opening of the battle. Just as we diverged to the right in order to secure the ground between the two batteries, a shot came very near to me, and turning my head, I saw Captain Reynolds go off his horse. I supposed, of course, that he was hit, and started to his assistance, but to my surprise he jumped up nimbly and remounted, saying, "That about took my breath away." The shot must have passed within a few inches of him, and was what afterwards was known in soldier's parlance, as "a close call."

We pushed forward and got the pieces in position between Ricketts's and Griffin's batteries, but before a single shot could be fired, the fatal mistake of the day occurred, the mistake of supposing a rebel com-



mand to be a portion of our own forces. Thick and fast their bullets came in upon us, and they were fast approaching in their charge, when with almost superhuman energy, and with a rapidity that I never saw excelled and I think I never saw equaled, our cannoneers limbered to the rear and we withdrew with a loss in material of only a caisson, the pole of which was broken in the endeavor to turn on the side hill, and there was no time then to stop for repairs. Here private Bubb (Frederick) lost his life, and private Vose (Warren L.) was wounded and taken prisoner. A bullet went through my cap and ploughed a little furrow in my scalp. Jumping from my horse to assist Sergeant Wilcox (G. Holmes) in limbering his piece, the animal dashed off frightened by the confusion, and I was obliged to ride to the rear on the stock of the gun carriage.

Arriving on the northerly side of the turnpike, we were joined by Captain Reynolds near the "Doogan" House, and shortly after by Lieutenant Weeden. Captain Reynolds said that he had just seen Arnold, (Captain of the regular artillery) who had lost his battery. I hastened with the two guns off to the



left, to the position that we first occupied in the morning, and, going into battery, commenced firing. The men worked steadier and cooler than they had at any time during the day. All at once there emerged from the timber in our front, a regiment or brigade of the enemy, evidently preparing for a charge upon us, and simultaneously came an order, from Captain Reynolds, I believe, to limber to the rear. I could not resist the temptation, in spite of the order, to give them one more shot before parting, and I directed the left piece to be loaded with canister. As the piece was fired, the enemy, apparently, was just ready to move forward on their charge. It appeared to me that a gap of full twenty feet was made in their line, which completely staggered them. This, I think, was the last shot fired on the field that day. The first one was fired by Sergeant Dwight.

Leaving the field on foot with this piece, I found the remainder of the battery a short distance away on the road, moving toward Centreville. Procuring a horse from one of the sergeants, I returned to the field in search of the horse that I had lost, for which



I had great affection. The scene was one of indescribable confusion, although there appeared to be no fright or terror in the minds of the men who were leaving the field. Officers seemed to have lost all identity with their commands, subalterns and even colonels moving along in the scattered crowd as if their work was over and they were wearily seeking the repose of their domiciles. The scene was such as to remind one of that which can be seen daily in any large manufacturing town or village, when the operatives, let loose by the expiration of their hours of labor, all set out for their respective homes. During working hours the system for work is maintained, but upon the ringing of the bell, all depart according to their respective bents and wills. So upon this field, the general impression seemed to be that the day's work was done and that the next thing in order was repose. There were a few notable exceptions. I remember well a large and powerful man, a field officer of what I took to be a Maine regiment—at any rate he and his men were uniformed in gray—using the most strenuous exertions to get his men together. He coaxed, threatened and



applied to them every epithet that he seemed capable of, but all to no purpose. The idea of the men seemed to be that their work was over for the day, and that they were going home to rest, not realizing apparently, that whether on or off duty, they were subject to the orders that their officers deemed best to give.

The bullets began to whistle uncomfortably thick, and I gave up the search for my horse, and rejoined the battery, then moving along the road in good order, in which condition it continued until the head of the column reached the foot of the hill at the base of which flowed what is known as Cub Run. Here was a bridge rendered impassable by the wrecks of several baggage wagons. In the ford at the left was an overturned siege gun, completely blocking up that passage, and the right ford was completely filled with troops and wagons. Of course the leading team of the battery had to halt, and it was impossible to stop the rear carriages on the steep hill, so that the column became only a jumbled heap of horses, limbers, caissons and gun carriages. To add to the confusion, just at this moment a rebel



battery in our rear opened fire, and it seemed as if every one of their shots came down into our very midst. The men immediately set to work taking the horses from their harnesses, after doing which they mounted upon them in the most lively manner. Some horses carried only a single passenger, others had on their backs doublets and some triplets. Still, notwithstanding all this confusion, there did not seem to me to be what has been almost universally reported, "a perfect panic." It appeared to me only that confusion which of necessity must arise from the sudden breaking up of organization.

I forded the run on the right hand, or down stream side of the bridge. Going up the hill after crossing, I overtook Captain Reynolds who crossed a little in advance of me, and just as I rode along side of him, a shot from the enemy's artillery struck the ground only a few feet from us. Unsophisticated as I was, I could not understand why they should continue to fire upon us when we were doing the best that we could to let them alone, and I said to Captain Reynolds, "What do you suppose they are trying to do?" His reply was a characteristic one: "They



are trying to kill every mother's son of us; that is what they are trying to do," the truth of which was very forcibly impressed upon me as shot after shot came screeching after us in rapid succession.

After getting beyond range of their fire, each one exerted himself to get together as many members of the battery as possible, and upon reaching Centreville all who had collected together assembled at the house of Mr. Utteback, which we had left in the morning. Captain Reynolds and most of the others, took up their quarters on the stoop or piazza of the house. I was suffering severely from a lame leg, which had been injured during the action by the recoil of a piece, and having won the good graces of the family during our stay there, I asked for more comfortable quarters, and was given a nice bed. About two o'clock in the morning, I was awakened and informed that orders had been received to leave for Washington at once. While I was dressing, one of the daughters of Mr. Utteback slipped into the room with a flask of wine which she handed to me with the remark, "I think you may need this before you reach Washington," and she added, "Don't, for



Heaven's sake, tell anybody of it." The act was an extremely kind one, for from the moment of our arrival on the farm, every member of the family had been besieged for liquor of any kind, but they had persistently refused to furnish any, declaring that they had not a drop in the house. I concealed the flask under my vest and found its contents of great cheer and comfort during our long night ride.

Upon going out of the house to resume the march, I found, to my surprise, that some time during the night, private Scott (Charles V.) had arrived in camp with the piece that I had sent off the field under Sergeant Hammond for want of ammunition. Upon enquiring of Scott for the particulars of his becoming possessed of it, he informed me that he got strayed from the company, and while picking his way through the woods, came upon the piece with all or a portion of the horses still hitched to it. Calling upon some infantry men near by, who were also estray, he mounted one horse himself and directed them to mount the other horses, and together they took the piece to Centreville. Its advent was hailed with special delight by every



member of the battery. Sergeant Hammond told me that he followed his instructions to the letter; that after directing his cannoneers to serve with the other pieces, he took the piece well to the rear and sought an obscure, and, as he thought, a secure place, and with his drivers remained by it awaiting orders. During the afternoon some cavalry appeared in their near vicinity, and supposing them to be rebel cavalry, they fled, knowing that if they attempted to take the piece with them, it would be captured and they would certainly be taken with it. It is highly probable that the cavalry they saw were a part of our own forces, but such had been the rumors and talk of rebel cavalry, its efficiency and the terrible work it was capable of performing, that the appearance of even a solitary horseman was enough to strike terror to the hearts of half a dozen ordinary men. Sergeant Hammond and his drivers rejoined the company at Centreville, assumed command of his piece, and took it to Washington with the company.\*

\* This account of the saving of the one piece from capture, does not agree with the statement in Stone's "Rhode Island in the Rebellion," 1864, nor with the "Adjutant General's Report, State of Rhode Island, 1865," which repeats



We reached Fort Runyon about six o'clock in the morning, but no troops were allowed to cross Long Bridge. I remember seeing Colonel Burnside about daylight that morning, pushing forward all alone, considerably in advance of the main column. Occasionally he would stop and look back as if to assure himself that all was right in that direction, as far as it could be right; then he would again push forward. About ten o'clock it became plain that he was looking out for the welfare of his command both in front and rear, for an order was received to allow Colonel Burnside's brigade to cross the bridge, the first who were allowed the privilege of returning to the camps

the statement of Mr. Stone. The testimony of Sergeant Hammond is herewith subjoined, also that of Captain Charles D. Owen:

The account given by Colonel Monroe, of the manner in which was saved from capture one of the pieces of his section, at the first battle of Bull Run, of which piece I was sergeant, is substantially correct.

JOHN H. HAMMOND,

*Formerly Sergeant Battery A, First R. I. L. A.,*

*Late Lieutenant H. G., R. I. V.*

To the best of my recollection the account as given by Colonel Monroe is correct.

CHAS. D. OWEN,

*Formerly Sergeant Battery A, R. I. L. A.,*

*Late Captain Battery G, R. I. L. A.*



that they had left and which seemed to them like home. In passing through the streets of Washington to our Camp Clark the sidewalks were lined with people, many of whom furnished us with refreshments.

The act of private Scott was finally rewarded by the bestowing upon him a commission as Second Lieutenant, in 1864. The piece was presented by the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island to Governor Sprague, who placed it in trust with the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery, in whose armory it is now kept.

THIS PAPER WAS READ BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, DECEMBER FIRST, 1875.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 3.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



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# REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE

IN THE

## FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY.

BY

GEORGE N. BLISS,

(Late Captain First Rhode Island Cavalry.)



PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE  
IN THE  
FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY.

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THE History of the First Rhode Island Cavalry was published in the summer of 1876, and as I was called upon to contribute to that whatever I could recall of interest in my experience as a soldier in the regiment, I find myself not a little puzzled to decide how I can make a satisfactory response to the demands of this society for more tales of a soldier. I can promise you no connected story, but will try to give such disconnected reminiscences as I may be able to recall of war times.

The first permanent camp occupied by the regiment in Virginia will never be forgotten by those who struggled for existence amid the desolations of "Camp Mud." On the seventh of April, 1862, at



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Warrenton Junction, a few miles north of the Rapahannock River, the regiment went into camp in an old cornfield, just as the rain commenced falling, and for three days rain, hail and snow showered upon our defenceless heads. We had no tents, but each man had been furnished with a strip of rubber cloth, so that two or three men, by uniting the pieces, could make what the soldiers called "dog tents,"—a sort of a letter A arrangement,—to enter which a man got down upon his hands and knees, crawled into the tent, and by shutting himself up like a jack-knife might, with the use of a vigorous imagination, consider himself under a roof. The men had never used these before, and for want of that knowledge which was to come to them as veterans they soon found themselves thoroughly soaked, lying under their tents in mud, so wet that as a man turned over you could hear the splashing of the water. On the second day of the storm, a few soldiers having gained a shelter from the rain beneath the canvas covering of an army wagon, some one suggested that a song might add cheerfulness to the situation, and the camp was astounded by the strains,



"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still";

sung in a manner that left no doubt as to the earnestness and sincerity of the minstrels. The railroad from Washington was not in running order, and we were therefore without forage for the horses or rations for the men, except so far as we were able to secure partial supplies by vigorous foraging, and when, at last, after three days of misery, the sun shone forth upon a camp looking like a gigantic mortar bed, horses stood at the picket lines dead in the mud, while saddles, bridles and arms were buried in the red clay soil. A man finding a leather strap upon the surface would by a vigorous pull ascertain that there was a saddle at the other end beneath the mud. These three days were the most miserable of our army life, and yet our suffering was in a great degree owing to the want of that soldierly knowledge which soon came to us in the active campaigns of the war. That same year, in December, 1862, the regiment encamped in a swamp during a furious snow storm, and yet in half an hour afterwards, horses stood at the picket lines con-



tentedly feeding, while at hundreds of fires men were frying pork, making coffee and generally enjoying the situation as though that swamp had always been their home and a very comfortable one at that; the dog tents were pitched in orderly array, each company by itself, while within beds were so constructed of pine boughs as to render the water splashing of old "Camp Mud" an impossibility. We remained at Camp Mud nearly a month, and yet it never was as comfortable as this swamp camp, where we tarried but a night. The difference was simply this: at the first camp we were raw troops, at the second we were veterans. We had gained by experience a faculty of adaptation to circumstances and a knowledge as to how to take care of ourselves, for want of which many a life was lost during the first months of campaigning.

Detachments of the regiment had been under fire at different times, and at Front Royal, May thirtieth, 1862, a hundred men of the New Hampshire Battalion had, by a gallant charge, driven from the town the Twelfth Georgia infantry regiment, a troop of cavalry and a section of artillery, capturing one



hundred and twenty of the enemy and recapturing twenty prisoners, men of our own army, with a loss of eight killed and seven wounded upon our side, but as a whole the regiment was under fire for the first time at the battle of Cedar Mountain, August ninth, 1862. Colonel Alfred N. Duffié had taken command of the regiment upon the eighth of July, 1862, and after a month of hard drilling was to test his work for the first time in battle. Perhaps a little incident, occurring at the time he gave his first order on dress parade, may give, in some degree, a picture of the man. When the first order was given with the peculiar accent of the Frenchman, some men in line laughed loud enough to reach the quick ears of the Colonel. Instantly he responded, "what for you laugh? I make you laugh!" There was nothing in the words, but something in the tone and manner in which the soldiers recognized at once a master, and the offence was never repeated.

On the night of August eighth, 1862, the regiment was upon picket duty at the front, and on the morning of the ninth we were in line of battle, facing Cedar Mountain, with the exception of Major Far-



rington's battalion (Preston M.), which was deployed as skirmishers. About noon a rebel battery threw a few shells at our regiment, and our batteries replying, the firing ceased in a few minutes without much damage upon either side. Between three and four o'clock in the afternoon the batteries upon the mountain side opened fire again, throwing shell intended for our regiment, but the firing was too high and they passed over our heads. At the same time a heavy infantry force was driving in our skirmishers. About sixty yards from our right wing was a dense forest. Major Farrington was ordered to withdraw his skirmish line and form his battalion in its proper place on the right of the other two battalions and next to the before-mentioned wood. Before the movement could be completed the rebel infantry line reached the edge of the wood, and halting there opened a heavy fire from pieces loaded with one ball and three buckshot, while the rebel shell from the artillery in our front whistled merrily over our heads. Nevertheless, the Colonel calmly waited until the alignment was completed, and then came the ringing order: "*Squadrons, Left Wheel, Form*



*Close Column!*" but by some misunderstanding Major Farrington's two squadrons made a left wheel before the Colonel had given the order, "MARCH," while the remainder of the regiment stood firm, waiting for the proper command. With an oath the Colonel struck his horse with the spurs and dashing up to the luckless Major, astonished him with a torrent of reproaches, shouting, "What a sickness; what a business; I be like you, I go buy one rope, I go hang myself;" and then by his orders the two squadrons were reined back into line and again the order came, "*Squadrons, Left Wheel, Form Close Column, MARCH!*" and the order was executed with the same care and attention to all the details which were usual upon the drilling ground. This evolution brought the men with their backs towards the rebel infantry, and seeing some of the men turn uneasily in their saddles and look towards the enemy, that grim old joker, Lieutenant Hiram P. Barker, comforted them with, "You might as well keep quiet boys, you can't get away." The next order from the Colonel was, "*By Platoons to the Front, MARCH,*" followed shortly by, "*Head of Col-*



*umn to the Left,*" and after two squadrons had turned to the left, "*Left into line, WHEEL!*" and on the head of third squadron, "*Front into line, face to the rear, MARCH!*" which order, promptly executed, left us fronting the enemy again, with our batteries just behind us, firing over our heads at the rebel batteries. This position was one which showed good military judgment upon the part of our Colonel. We were sheltered by the nature of the ground, occupying, as we did, a little depression in a cornfield,—a few yards further to the front or rear would have exposed us to heavy loss, as the rebel shell fell thick both in our front and rear,—and yet we were ready for a dash at the enemy at any moment had orders for an advance been given. We held this position an hour or two, when by orders from General Banks we were withdrawn to the rear. Although thus exposed to the enemy's fire at the front for two or three hours, our loss was only three killed, six wounded and four missing. That it was so small was entirely due to the military skill and good judgment of Colonel Duffié in forming his line in such a position that the shot and shell of the enemy either



struck the ground in front of us or passed over our heads. This experience was of great value to the regiment; the men acquired confidence in their officers and in each other, and ever afterwards felt themselves veterans, with a good reputation which was to be maintained. The day was intensely hot, and Lieutenant James P. Taylor received a sun-stroke which caused his death upon the morning of the following day, August tenth.

During the winter of 1862 and 1863 the cavalry of the army of the Potomac was for the first time put into condition to be effective in the service. Previous to that time it had been scattered about as escorts, body guards, and generally so disposed as to have no opportunity for proper drill and other preparation for discharging its appropriate duty as a distinct arm of the military service, so that when General Joe Hooker said, "who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" there was a general roar of laughter throughout the army. General Stoneman having been assigned to command the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, the regiments were massed near Potomac Creek Bridge, a few miles north of Freder-



icksburg and the Cavalry Corps organized. In obedience to orders, all officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, were set to work studying the cavalry tactics, and regular recitations were holden evenings by the light of candles in the officers' tents. The non-commissioned officers recited their lessons to the senior captain in each squadron, the commissioned officers in each battalion recited to the majors, and at certain stated times the majors and captains were assembled at the colonel's tent and examined as to their knowledge in tactics. In addition to these military studies the cavalry was daily exercised upon the drill-ground in squadron, battalion and regimental drill, while occasional brigade drills and division reviews gave the generals practice in the movements of large bodies of troops. The study and drill of this winter produced a cavalry corps which was ever after respected in our own army and dreaded by the enemy. Colonel Duffié, who commanded at this time a brigade, had considerable trouble in bringing one regiment, the Fourth New York, into a proper condition as regarded drill; there were said to be fifty-three dif-



ferent languages and dialects spoken in that regiment, and the Colonel thus explained his troubles: "The colonel of the Fourth New York, he give an order, all the officer they stick up their head, they holler like one geese."

At Kelley's Ford, March seventeenth, 1863, was given the first opportunity, after the formation of the cavalry corps, for a fair combat with the rebel cavalry in an open field. Kelley's Ford is situated upon the Rappahannock River some thirty miles above Fredericksburg; when our troops approached the north bank of the ford they found the enemy had constructed a strong barricade upon that side, and that a hundred rebel riflemen, protected by pits upon the south side, were ready to dispute the passage of the river. The Fourth New York were ordered to charge across the ford. They charged down to the barricade and then charged back again. At this moment Major Chamberlain of the First Massachusetts Cavalry, a staff officer, came to the First Rhode Island Cavalry and said, "I want a platoon of men who will go where I tell them." He was given a platoon of eighteen men, commanded by



Lieutenant Simeon Brown, and started with them for the ford. The Major told Lieutenant Brown he wished him to charge across the river and drive the enemy out of the rifle pits, but just as he finished his instructions by saying, "If you do that it will be a good thing for you," the Major was himself hit by two rifle bullets, one cutting off the tip of his nose and the other entering his mouth, and taking such a course as finally led to its extraction from between his shoulders. Leaving the wounded Major the Lieutenant pressed forward in pursuit of "the good thing." Only one horse could leap the barricade at a time, and the swiftly flowing water was breast high upon the horses, but the gallant officer and his brave men pressed boldly forward, with the rifle bullets hissing and singing about them; horses went down in the surging water, pierced by bullets; men were struck from the saddle by the deadly fire, but the column still advanced. At last Lieutenant Brown rode his horse up to the edge of a rifle pit in which eight rebels were lying, and every man had his rifle aimed at the Lieutenant, but not one fired, so astonished were they at such a spectacle. Before



the enemy could recover from their stupor, the Lieutenant had wheeled his horse, galloped a few yards to the right and dismounted behind a tree. Here he was joined by two of his men, who had also succeeded in crossing the river, and taking their carbines, he opened a raking fire upon the nearest rifle pit, killing two men and wounding a third. The rebels could not leave the rifle pits without exposing themselves to a heavy fire from our men lining the opposite bank of the river, which fact protected the Lieutenant in his flanking operations. The rebels were discouraged by the fact that in spite of their fire some of our men had succeeded in crossing the river, and our men were correspondingly encouraged by the same fact, and so, when the rebels saw another column leaping the barricade for the passage of the river, they abandoned the rifle pits and made a sharp run for their horses. But they were not quite quick enough, and twenty-five of them were captured. Of the eighteen men who followed the Lieutenant only three succeeded in reaching the opposite shore, the others having been stopped by bullets either in the horse or his rider. Lieutenant



Brown rode a white horse; five bullets passed through his clothing and three lodged in his horse, yet not a drop of blood was drawn upon the officer, and the horse soon recovered from his wounds. General Hooker, at that time commanding the army of the Potomac, sent for Lieutenant Brown to come to his tent and personally thanked him for this gallant deed, and on his recommendation the Lieutenant was promoted to the grade of captain; but alas, he escaped the dangers of battle only to die at home of disease contracted in the service.

The cavalry combat of which this was merely the beginning, is fully described in the History of the Regiment, and I will not repeat it here, but content myself by observing that upon this day the First Rhode Island Cavalry met, with the sabre on an open field, three separate charges of General Stuart's best Virginia cavalry and was victorious each time. At the beginning of the action Major Farrington was wounded by a bullet through the neck, inflicting a severe and dangerous wound, but after having his wound dressed at the field hospital he returned to his regiment and led it in two successful charges



against the enemy. This affair at Kelley's Ford was a small affair so far as damage inflicted upon the enemy or loss upon our side was concerned, but the moral effect was of priceless value. Our men were fully convinced that they were superior to the rebel cavalry, and were confident that they could always beat them by a charge with the sabre, and from that day until the war closed our cavalry never failed to defeat the enemy on every occasion where they had an opportunity to charge with the sabre. This action also demonstrated the fact that our cavalry was superior to the enemy in drill and tactics; the charges of the enemy were made in column, eight abreast, which our cavalry met with regimental front, thus outflanking the enemy upon both sides, which of itself rendered certain the defeat of the rebel cavalry. The enemy were certainly very much surprised by the vigorous and brilliant charges of our men, and years after a rebel cavalryman said to the writer of these lines, who was then a prisoner of war: "Your men never fought with the sabre so well as they did at Kelley's Ford."

About the time of the battle of Chancellorville,



in May, 1863, the North was very much interested in the draft, and at this time I saw, one day walking along the road, two soldiers who had evidently just left a field hospital—one having the right arm, the other the left arm amputated at the shoulder; they were both pale and weak from loss of blood and the shock of the operation. Suddenly I saw the face of one of them, who was a short distance in advance of the other, break into a smile from some thought that pleased him, and stopping and turning towards his comrade, he said: "I say, Jim, we'll be out of the draft."

At Middleburg, Virginia, June eighteenth, 1863, a rebel soldier demanded of Lawrence Cronan, a corporal in Company C, the surrender of the guidon, a small swallow-tailed United States flag which he carried as a company color, and being refused he sent a bullet through Cronan's left arm and breast; but to the astonishment of the rebel, Cronan rode off with the flag as though nothing had happened. Our men charged the enemy and drove them from the field a few minutes later, and Cronan, faint from loss of blood, surrendered the flag to a comrade and



was left behind to fall into the enemy's hands as a prisoner. Later, however, in the same day Cronan was recaptured by Union cavalry and sent to the hospital in Washington, where he soon recovered from his wound, rejoined his regiment and served until the end of the war. This incident happened in a wheat field, and I shall never forget the wrath of the Southern planter, who stood upon his piazza and cursed, with equal vigor and impartiality, the soldiers of both armies as the horses trampled ruthlessly under foot the waving grain.

The story of war's desolation is as old as the history of man, and yet no written statements can reproduce the pictures which linger in the memory of soldiers who have seen for themselves the ruin and destruction inseparable from the movement of an army. When the army of the Potomac encamped in front of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in the autumn of 1862, much of the country was covered with a heavy growth of timber; the soldiers first cut down the trees several feet above the ground; then, as wood became less abundant, they cut the stumps close down to the ground, and finally dug up the stumps



and the spreading roots for fuel, doing the work so thoroughly that it would have been difficult to have found a root as large as a man's finger in the ground which had a few months before been covered with the vigorous growth of the forest. Certainly no land was ever more effectually cleared for the plow, but how the owners of the soil managed to re-establish their boundary lines, with every fence, tree and landmarks generally destroyed for miles in all directions, puzzles the imagination.

On the seventeenth day of August, 1864, orders were issued for the destruction of all the wheat and hay south of a line from Millwood to Winchester and Petticoat Gap in the Valley of the Shenandoah, Virginia, and for the seizure of all mules, horses and cattle that might be useful to the army. Shenandoah means, in the Indian language, "daughter of the stars"—a name well merited by the bright silvery waters of this mountain stream, flowing through one of the most beautiful valleys in the world, with a soil so fertile as to have gained for it the name of "the garden of Virginia." This seventeenth day of August, 1864, was a perfect summer day; not a



cloud obscured the pathway of the sun; the mountain peaks were clearly outlined against the horizon, while all the level lowland seemed smiling with the well-filled barns and huge stacks of an abundant harvest. Such was the scene upon which the sun rose, but soon the wasting flames were seen blazing in all directions; barns, cribs and stacks soon changed to dust and ashes; women and children, with tears streaming down their wretched cheeks, begged the stern soldiers to spare them the food necessary to keep them from starving in the fast approaching winter. It was pitiful, but the soldiers could not spare; their hard duty was to obey orders. It is estimated that, upon this single day, enough of the finest wheat in the world to subsist a hundred thousand men for a year was destroyed, and that in a few weeks twenty-five million dollars worth of property was swept from the face of the valley under this order. Never did man pen more truthful words than General Sherman's famous sentence, "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it."

On many a night when the cavalry halted for a camp, in every regiment could be heard the orders,



"Prepare to dismount!—DIS-MOUNT!—numbers one and three hold the horses, numbers two and four go and get rails," and soon thousands of camp fires were blazing with the fencing materials of the farms. At night the well kept fences clearly marked the farmer's fields; in the morning, far as the eye could reach there was nothing to show that a fence had ever existed, and the whole country was laid open as a common. The whole face of the landscape had been changed in a single night, so that it might puzzle the oldest inhabitant to recognize his familiar haunts. Can you imagine the farmer looking about his premises on the following morning; the soldiers have passed away like a troubled dream, and so have his cattle, sheep and horses, with all his wheat, hay, corn, oats, and everything else that could be devoured by man or beast. But yesterday he was the owner of a thriving and well appointed farm; today there remains only empty buildings and desolate fields. Surely, in sympathy with misfortune, we may pardon something to the planter who on such an occasion exclaimed. in the fullness of his heart, "I wish all the soldiers in both armies were rammed, jammed, right slap into hell."



The Fourth New York Cavalry has received notices already in this paper, but not of a favorable nature. Its colonel was an Italian count, Cesnola by name—the same man who has recently attracted public notice by his discovery of antiquities while serving this country as Consul at Cyprus, in the Mediterranean. Colonel Cesnola was a gallant officer, but found it difficult to make soldiers out of the motley mass that composed his regiment and finally in June, 1863, he was taken prisoner by reason of the bad conduct of his men. After ten months experience as a prisoner of war, he was returned to his regiment, and resumed command of it with a determination to retrieve the reputation of the regiment. He said: "I propose to put these rascals through a course of drill and discipline until on some occasion they distinguish themselves in battle, and the moment they have done that I shall resign." He carried these intentions strictly into effect, and at last on the fifteenth day of August, 1864, he charged at the head of the Fourth New York two rebel regiments of infantry and put them to rout, capturing two battle flags and an hundred and fifty prisoners; and



while the army was ringing with the first news of this gallant deed of arms, Colonel Cesnola sat in his tent writing a resignation of his commission. He said: "I cannot depend upon them; they have covered me with glory to-day, they may disgrace me to-morrow." Colonel Cesnola's military history was a striking illustration of the power of a brave and determined officer to achieve brilliant success with the most unpromising material in the rank and file of his regiment.

The popular idea of a cavalryman is that of a soldier mounted on a spirited horse, dashing through the enemy's country at a gallop; but in reality cavalry always move at a walk, except in the immediate presence of the enemy, and three miles and a half an hour was a good rate of speed for the advance of a column of cavalry. On a hot, still summer day, the red clay, pulverized into dust as fine as flour, would rise in such blinding clouds that a man could not see his comrade riding a few paces in front of him; and then, after hours of dusty experience, a thunder shower would turn these dusty accumulations into liquid mud, and so change a man's per-



sonal appearance that his own mother could not have recognized him. The cavalryman about to leave camp would have strapped upon his saddle three pecks of oats, a gray woolen blanket, a rubber blanket, an overcoat, canteen, etc., while upon his person would be strapped a carbine, pistol, and sabre, with ammunition, and a haversack containing eight days rations; and when a soldier mounted his horse thus laden down the reasons for moving at a walk were plainly visible. Yet, with all the care and precaution that could be taken, the loss of horses in the army was enormous, and it was estimated that the average life of a horse in the service was only four months. When Sheridan moved up the Valley of the Shenandoah in September, 1864, it was estimated there were eight thousand horses in his army, and out of this small number the provost guard, at the rear of the column, was obliged to shoot on an average a hundred horses a day; most of these animals would have been in good condition for service if they could have had a week's rest, but if they could not keep up with the column it was necessary to shoot them, otherwise the native population would



have run them off into the mountain pastures and they would soon have had rebel soldiers on their backs.

After three years service in the field it was my fortune to be a prisoner of war, and as such I lived about four months in Libby Prison, forty-five days of which I passed in a cell as a hostage for a rebel soldier sentenced to be hung. Much has been written upon prison life, and I will give only one or two incidents in connection with my experience. Our food consisted of black beans or peas, sometimes called cow peas, and corn bread, made, as it seemed to us, from corn ground up with the cob and grain together, and occasionally a little meat or salt fish. The beans were the vilest food I ever ate; each one had either a fly or a worm in it, and the taste was that rank flavor peculiar to a sun-burned potato. The food was, of course, insufficient, and we were always hungry; and as the food for a squad of men was delivered in bulk to one of the number selected as a commissary, the division of the rations required exact and careful judgment. The beans were divided by measurement with a very small tin



cup, while the bread and meat were carefully divided into separate portions by the commissary. In our cell there were five men, so five little piles were made, and after, by weighing in his hands and numerous inspections by the eye, taking a little from this pile and adding a little to another, the commissary had made the portions as nearly equal as possible, one of our number was turned with his back to the food, when the commissary, placing his finger upon a portion, said, "who shall have this?" In response a comrade's name was given, and so on until all the rations were distributed—a method which avoided all dispute as to any possible unfairness in the division. Each night we cut a notch upon a board and congratulated each other upon the fact that "another day of misery had gone." At length on the fifth day of February, 1865, the hostages, nine in number, all commissioned officers, and about a thousand men of our rank and file, went on board the rebel flag of truce boat and passed down the James river *en route* for that happy land, which a prisoner always called "God's Country."



As I looked about on the boat at my fellow prisoners, I noticed that their confinement and hardships seemed to have taken the human expression out of their features and substituted for it the fierce and brutal appearance of hungry animals. I saw two men fighting for a bone a well fed dog would not have looked at ; and yet, these men knew that they would soon be inside the Union lines and supplied with abundant food. The rebel officials upon the boat treated our little squad of officers very kindly, and calling us into a small room they gave us some excellent boiled mutton and corn bread of the finest quality. As it was a little crowded I stepped out of the room with the food in my hands ; instantly a soldier rushed towards me with both hands extended to seize the food, and without saying a word I gave it to him. He said : "Excuse me, sir ; when I saw that food I could not resist the temptation to reach forward and seize it ; I was a man once, I am nothing but a brute now ; only the animal instincts remain." I have always regretted that I did not learn this man's name ; it was no common mind that could thus realize the degradation to which his sufferings had reduced him.



I cannot describe to you the scene when these weary and broken prisoners first caught sight of the old flag; tears streamed down the cheeks of men who had endured prison hardship and suffering without a murmur; that flag seemed to mean for them not alone the symbol of their country—it represented home, food, friends and all that could render life desirable. On board our own flag of truce boat hot coffee and abundant food was at once furnished to the released men, who were so excited by the joy of freedom that they could not sleep when night came, and hardly a man slept during the first twenty-four hours. There seemed to be a universal desire upon the part of each man to give a full account of his prison life, and if he could find anyone to listen the story was given in full.

There was among the officers one man so lank and emaciated as to have received the nickname, "Slim Jim of the bone yard." This man was suddenly seized with a severe fit of spasms, about three o'clock in the morning of our first night upon our flag of truce boat, and the hospital steward hastened to his relief with a bottle of brandy; after the sick man



was relieved somewhat and the steward was about to go to his stateroom, a New Jersey major astonished him with the demand, "Leave that bottle of brandy here; there will be another case of spasms in less than fifteen minutes." The disgusted steward thought a trick had been played upon him, but as a matter of fact the sickness of Jim was a reality, and it was natural for a New Jersey man to wish for some of the remedy.

I will close this fragmentary sketch by saying that for myself I hope war may never again come to blast and sear our fair land, and I cannot believe any soldier here would wish again to see such days as when Whittier sang,

"The battle flags like storm birds fly,  
The charging trumpets blow."



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 4.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



MY FIRST CRUISE AT SEA

AND THE

LOSS OF THE IRON-CLAD MONITOR.

BY

FRANK B. BUTTS,

(Late Paymaster's Clerk, United States Navy.)

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MY FIRST CRUISE AT SEA  
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LOSS OF THE IRON-CLAD MONITOR.

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ABOUT the first of November, or late in October, 1862, while I was stationed at Washington Navy Yard, a call was made for volunteers to add to the crew of the new Ericsson iron-clad steamer Monitor. I had then been in the naval service about two months, one of which was spent on board the receiving ship North Carolina at Brooklyn Navy Yard, and one at Washington Navy Yard, where I occupied a very pleasant position as clerk in the commandant's office. The Monitor had already immortalized herself in history, and thinking I might possibly share in some future glory, I offered myself, as did no less than two hundred others, and sixteen men besides myself were selected. We were taken



on board the Monitor, when, after another inspection, seven of the number were selected, including myself, who, for our personal appearance or some other reason, were called out and allowed to stay on board, while the others very sorrowfully returned to their quarters in the Yard. At first I thought myself quite fortunate to secure such a vessel, but I soon changed my mind and joined in the opinion of the rest of the crew, that a Monitor was the worst craft for a man to live aboard that ever floated upon water. The Monitor, compared with turreted vessels that have been launched since, was a very diminutive and imperfect vessel.

The sixth of November, when everything had been made perfect about the vessel and machinery, we hauled out from the Navy Yard into the Potomac river, and in a few hours were steaming towards the south. The first night we anchored at the mouth of the river, and the following day, after a pleasant sail down the Chesapeake, we arrived, amidst a salute, at Hampton Roads, and came to anchor off Newport News. The life of a sailor on board this vessel was the most laborious of any in the service. Their



quarters were small, there being only fourteen inches allowed for each hammock, while underneath, or perhaps over their heads, were the separate engines for working the extra attachments to the vessel, and a man was rarely allowed to sit a moment on the berth deck, even if he had the leisure. The deck of the vessel, as is well known, was nearly even with the water,—along the sides it was only twelve inches above the surface,—and the ordinary waves in that locality would sweep the whole width of the vessel. I will venture to say that my feet were not dry once in the whole time I was on board the Monitor.

We did not expect that our lives were to be spent at Hampton Roads. The Merrimack had been blown up by the rebels themselves, the new iron-clads, part of which were then in commission, began to arrive, the Army of the Potomac was on the march to Fredericksburg, Richmond could not be approached by water, and it seemed as if the work planned for us must be further south. We soon noticed that preparations were going on in which we were expected to be prominent, and we changed an-



chorage to Fortress Monroe. Here we took in a full supply of coal, and several tons of shot and shell. I was quite cheerful over the prospect of being called into action, more so because I knew there were eleven inches of iron plates to keep off the sharpshooters' bullets, and as the Monitor had proved herself impregnable to any artillery then in use, I thought our side would have the advantage in a good fair fight. Orders were in the hands of our Captain, Commander Bankhead, to proceed to Charleston, South Carolina. There was no definite time mentioned for us to start, as the Navy Department had left it to the judgment of more experienced navigators to select favorable weather. For several days there had been a storm, and not until the morning of the twenty-ninth of December did indications seem favorable.

At daybreak we hove short our anchor, and at ten o'clock in the forenoon got under way. The Rhode Island, a powerful side-wheeled steamer, was to be our convoy, and to hasten our speed took us in tow with two long twelve-inch hawsers. The weather was heavy, with dark, stormy-looking clouds and a



westerly wind. We passed out of the Roads and rounded Cape Henry, with but little change in the weather up to the next day at noon, when the wind shifted to the south-south-west and increased to a gale. It was my trick at the lee wheel at twelve o'clock, and being a good hand I was kept there. At dark we were about seventy miles at sea, and directly off Cape Hatteras. The sea rolled high and pitched together in that peculiar manner only seen at Hatteras. The Rhode Island steamed slowly and steadily ahead. The sea rolled over us as if our vessel were a rock in the ocean only a few inches above the water, and men who stood abaft on the deck of the Rhode Island have told me that we were thought several times to have gone down. It seemed that for minutes we were out of sight, as the heavy seas entirely submerged the vessel. I had been stationed at the wheel, which had been temporarily rigged on top of the turret, and where most of the officers were. I heard their remarks, and watched closely the movements of the vessel, so that I exactly understood our condition. This going to sea in an iron-clad I began to think would be the last I



should volunteer for, and I remembered what I had been taught in the service, that a man always got into a muss if he volunteered, (and in my experience the saying was true). All the officers except those on duty in the engine-room were now on the turret. We made very heavy weather, riding one huge wave, and, being heavier than a wooden ship, with no hold for the water to raise her, plunging through the next, and splashing down upon another with a shock that would sometimes take us off our feet, while the next would sweep over us and break far above the turret, and if we had not been protected by a rifle armor we would have been washed away. The water had for some time been running down through the coal bunkers, and it is my opinion that some of the covers on deck were removed by the heavy seas, although it has been reported that the side plates had sprung apart. It was then about eight o'clock in the evening, and it was reported that the coal was too wet to keep up steam, which had now run down from its usual pressure of eighty pounds to twenty. The water in the vessel was gaining rapidly over the small pumps, which had



been working, and I heard the Captain order the Chief Engineer to start the main pump, a very powerful one of new invention, which was done, as I saw a stream of water eight inches in diameter spouting up from beneath the waves.

Signals of distress were burned to the Rhode Island. She lay to, and we rode the sea more comfortably. The Rhode Island was obliged to turn slowly ahead to keep from drifting upon us and prevent the tow-lines from being caught in her wheels. At one time when she drifted close alongside, our Captain shouted through his trumpet that we were sinking and to send their boats. The Monitor steamed ahead again with renewed difficulties, and I was ordered to leave the wheel and was kept employed as messenger by the Captain. The Chief Engineer reported the coal too wet to keep up steam and work both pump and the main engine. The tow lines were ordered to be cut, and I saw a man in attempting to obey the order swept from the deck and carried by a heavy sea leeward and out of sight in a moment. Our daring boatswain's mate then succeeded in reaching the bows of the vessel, and I



saw him swept by a heavy sea far away into the darkness, only to hear his voice once say "Farewell."

Our anchor was let go with all the cable, and struck bottom in about sixty fathoms of water. The fires were dull. The small pumps were choked up with water, and the main pump had almost stopped working. This was reported to the Captain, and I was ordered to see if there was any water in the wardroom. This was the first time I had been below the berth deck. I went forward, and saw the water running in through the hawse-pipe, an eight inch hole, at full force. Around the sides, where the hull had broken from the deck, there were several openings where the water poured in in large streams. The deck projected, in a shelf-like form, fifteen feet forward and aft and eight feet on the sides, with a heavy six-inch iron plating extending four feet below the water, and the weight of the vessel, aided by the tremendous force of the heavy seas striking between them, had caused this separation, and this particular defect in the Monitor build was the cause of the disaster.

I reported my observations, and at the same time



heard the Chief Engineer report that the water had gained very rapidly. The Captain ordered him to stop the main engine and turn all steam on the pumps, which I noticed soon worked again, and I felt somewhat encouraged. The clouds now began to separate and a moon of about half size beamed out upon the sea, and the Rhode Island, now a mile away, became visible. Signals were being exchanged and I felt that all would be saved, or at least that the Captain would not leave his ship until there was no hope of saving her. I was sent below again to see how the water stood in the wardroom. I went forward to the cabin and found the water just above the soles of my shoes, which indicated that there must be three or four feet in the vessel. I reported the same to the Captain, and all hands were set to bailing,—bailing out the ocean, as it seemed to be,—but the object was to employ the men and keep down the excitement. I kept employed most of the time taking the buckets from through the hatchway on top of the turret. They seldom would have more than a pint of water in them, the balance having been spilled out in passing from one to another.



The weather was clear but the sea did not cease rolling in the least, and the Rhode Island, with the tow lines wound up in her wheel, was rolling at the mercy of the sea, and came washing against our sides. A boat that had been lowered was caught between the vessels and sunk. Some of our seamen bravely leaped down on deck to guard our sides, and lines were thrown to them from the deck of the Rhode Island, which now lay her whole length against us, floating off astern, but not a man would be the first to leave his ship although the Captain ordered them to do so. I was again sent to examine the water in the wardroom, which I found to be more than two feet above the deck, and I think I was the last to look on a young engineer who lay seasick in his bunk, apparently watching the water as it grew deeper and deeper, and conscious what his fate must be. He called me as I passed his door, and asked if the pumps were working. I replied that they were. "Is there any hope?" he asked, and feeling a little moved at the scene, knowing certainly what must be his end, and the darkness that stared at us all, I replied, "As long as there is life there is hope."



"Hope and hang on when you are wrecked," is an old saying among sailors. I left the wardroom, and learned that the water had gained so as to choke up the main pump. As I was crossing the berth deck I heard the cabin cook, an old African negro, who was more excited himself than any one else, giving some very consoling lessons to the landsmen, who looked like death with seasickness, in a manner that many of you may have seen men display on such occasions. He congratulated them for being in a metallic coffin, and that the devil would surely pick their bones as no shark could penetrate their graves, and made other startling remarks, not spoken in so mild a way, and too wicked to be remembered.

As I ascended the turret ladder the sea broke over the ship and came pouring down the hatchway with so much force that it took me off my feet, and at the same time the steam broke from the boiler-room, as the water had reached the fires, and for an instant I seemed to realize that we had gone down. Our fires were out and I heard them blowing the water out of the boilers. I reported my observations to the Captain, and at the same time saw a boat alongside.



The Captain gave orders for the men to leave the ship, and fifteen, all of whom were seamen and men whom I had placed my confidence upon, were the ones who crowded this, the first boat to leave the ship. I was disgusted at witnessing the scramble, and not feeling in the least alarmed about myself, resolved that I, an "old haymaker," as landmen are called, would stick to the ship as long as my officers. I saw three of these men swept from the deck and carried leeward to find their graves beneath the angry sea.

Bailing was again resumed. I occupied the turret all alone, and passed buckets from the lower hatchway to the man on top of the turret. I took off my coat—one that I had received from home only a few days previous, (I could not feel that our noble little ship was yet lost,)—and rolling it up with my boots, drew the tompon from one of the guns, placed them inside and returned the tompon. We had a black cat on board, which then sat on the breech of one of the guns, howling one of those hoarse and solemn tunes which no one can appreciate, unless filled with the superstitious which I had been taught by the



sailors who were afraid to kill a cat. I would almost as soon have touched a ghost, but I caught her and placing her in another gun, replaced the wad and tompon, but could still hear that distressing yeowl. As I raised my last bucket to the upper hatchway no one was there to take it. I scrambled up the ladder and found that we below had been deserted. I shouted to those on the berth deck to "Come up—the officers have left the ship and a boat is alongside."

As I reached the top of the turret I saw a boat made fast on the weather quarter filled with men, and three were standing on deck trying to get on board. One man was floating leeward, shouting in vain for help, another, who hurriedly passed me and jumped down from the turret, was swept off by a breaking wave and never arose, even to say, "Save me." I was excited, feeling that it was the only chance to be saved. I made fast a loose line to one of the stanchions and let myself down from the turret, the ladder having been washed away. The moment I struck the deck the sea broke over the decks and swept me as I had seen it sweep my shipmates.



I grasped one of the smoke stack braces and, hand-over-hand, ascended to keep my head above water, and it required all my strength to keep the sea from tearing me away. As it swept from the vessel I found myself dangling in the air nearly at the top of the smoke stack. I let fall, and succeeded in reaching the ridge rope that encircled the deck by means of short stanchions, and to which the boat was attached. The sea again broke over us, lifting me heels upward as I still clung to the ridge rope. I thought I had nearly measured the depth of the ocean, when I felt the turn, and as my head rose above the water I spouted up, it seemed, more than a gallon of water that had found its way into my lungs. I was then about twenty feet from the other men, whom I found to be the Captain and one seaman—the other had been washed overboard and was now struggling in the water. The men in the boat were pushing back on their oars to keep the boat from being washed on to the Monitor's deck, so that the boat had to be hauled in by the painter about ten or twelve feet. The First Lieutenant and other officers in the boat were shouting, "Is the Captain on board?"



and with severe struggles to have our voices heard above the roar of the wind and sea, we were shouting "No," and trying to haul in the boat, which we at last succeeded in doing. Then the Captain, ever caring for his men, requested us to get in, but we both, in the same voice, told him to get in first. The moment he was over the bows of the boat the Lieutenant cried, "Cut the painter! cut the painter!" I thought, "Now or lost," and in less time than I can explain it, exerting my strength beyond imagination, I hauled in the boat, sprang, caught on the gunwale, was pulled into the boat with a boat-hook in the hands of one of the men, and took my seat with one of the oarsmen. The other man, named Joice, managed to get into the boat in some way, I cannot tell how, and he was the last man saved from that ill-fated ship. As we were cut loose I saw several men standing on top of the turret, apparently afraid to venture down upon deck, and it may have been that they saw others washed overboard while I was getting into the boat, which caused their fear.

We reached the Rhode Island, which had drifted



perhaps two miles leeward, after a fearful and dangerous passage over the frantic seas, and came alongside under the lee bows, where the first boat that had left the Monitor, nearly an hour before, had just discharged its men. We found that getting on board the Rhode Island was a harder task than getting from the Monitor. We were carried by the sea from stem to stern, for to make fast would have been fatal, and the boat bounded against the ship's sides; sometimes it was below the wheel, and then, on the summit of a huge wave, far above the decks; then the two boats would crash together, and once while our surgeon was holding on to the rail, he lost his fingers by a collision which swamped the other boat. Lines were thrown to us from the deck of the Rhode Island, which were of no assistance, for not one of us could climb a small rope, and besides, the men who threw them would immediately let go their holds in their excitement, to throw another—which I found to be the case when I kept hauling in rope instead of climbing, and concluded, as the Irishman told his captain, that the end was cut off.

It must be understood that two vessels lying



side by side, when there is any motion to the water, move alternately, or, in other words, one is constantly passing the other up or down. At one time when our boat was near the bows of the steamer we would rise upon the sea until we could touch her rail, and in an instant, by a very rapid descent, we could touch her keel. While we were thus rising and falling upon the sea, I caught a rope, and rising with the boat, managed to reach within a foot or two of the rail, when a man, if there had been one, could easily have hauled me on board. But they all followed after the boat, which at that instant was washed astern, and I hung dangling in the air over the bow of the Rhode Island, with our Acting Master hanging to the cat-head, three or four feet from me, and like myself, both hands clenching a rope, and bawling for some one to save us. Our hands grew painful and all the time weaker, until I saw his strength give way. He slipped a foot, caught again, and with his last prayer, "O God," I saw him fall and sink to rise no more. The ship rolled, and rose and fell upon the sea, sometimes with her keel out of water, or at its surface, when



I was thirty feet above the sea, and with the fate in view that called home our much-beloved companion, which no one witnessed save myself, I still clung to the rope with aching hands, calling in vain for some one to save my life. But I could not be heard, for the wind shrieked far above my voice. My heart here, for the only time in my life, gave up hope, and home and friends were most tenderly thought of. While I was in this state, within a few seconds of giving up, the sea rolled forward, bringing with it the boat, and when I would have fallen into the sea, the boat was there. I can only recollect hearing an old sailor say, as I fell into the bottom of the boat, "Where in hell did he come from?"

When I was conscious of what was going on, no one had succeeded in getting out of the boat, which then lay just forward of the wheel-house. Our Captain ordered them to throw bowlines, which was immediately done. The second one I caught and was hauled on board. I assisted in helping the others out of the boat, when it again went back to the Monitor, but did not reach it, and after drifting about on the ocean several days it was picked up by a passing vessel and carried to Philadelphia.



It was now half-past twelve, the night of the thirty-first of December, 1862. I stood on the forecastle of the Rhode Island, watching the red and white lights that hung from the pennant staff above the turret, and which now and then as we would perhaps both rise on the sea together, beam across the dark and raging sea, until at last just as the moon had passed below the horizon, 'twas lost, and the Monitor, whose history is still familiar with us all, the victor of the first iron-clad conflict, the savior of our naval forces, plunged with a dying struggle at her treacherous foe and was seen no more.

The following day we arrived at Hampton Roads. This sad news reached every household, and our nation wept. As near as I can now remember, there were thirty-three lives lost and twenty-eight saved.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 5.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1878.



# KIT CARSON'S FIGHT

WITH THE

## COMANCHE AND KIOWA INDIANS,

AT THE ADOBE WALLS, ON THE CANADIAN RIVER,

NOVEMBER 25TH, 1864.

BY GEORGE H. PETTIS,

(Brevet Captain U. S. Volunteers, late First Lieutenant First Infantry, California Volunteers, and  
Lieutenant and Adjutant First Infantry, New Mexico Volunteers.)

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THE summer of 1864 will long be remembered by our frontiersmen as a season when the Comanche, the Kiowa, the Arapahoe, the Cheyenne, and the Plain Apache held high carnival on our western plains. From the early spring of that year, when the hardy Indian pony could subsist on the growing grass of the prairies, until late in the fall, they committed their depredations, and there was not a week of that whole season, but that some outrage was committed by them. They seemed to have conceived the idea that the white man could be exterminated, and by concerted action, and by striking at different points, to have fondly hoped that they could once more roam and hunt at their pleasure, free and unmolested



by the white man's civilization. The determined operations of the western Indians and their concerted action at this time, has led some to believe that it was a part of the programme of, and that they had been incited to this by, the leaders of the rebellion. It seems plausible, too, for when the grand old Army of the Potomac was fighting the battles of the Wilderness, of Spottsylvania, of North Anna, of Cold Harbor, and Petersburg, and the Weldon Railroad, Ream's Station, Peeble's Farm, and Boydton Road; and Sheridan had rode his "twenty miles from Winchester town," and had driven Early out of the Shenandoah valley; and Sherman was fighting the battles that led to the capture of Atlanta, the Indians were spreading havoc and destruction in all directions. No trains crossed the plains that season without being attacked, and none but those with strong military escorts escaped capture and destruction. Houses and barns on the frontier were fired, stock of all kinds was nowhere secure, large and small parties were attacked, men, women, and children murdered. In fact, the year 1864 will be sadly remembered as long as the pres-



ent generation of frontiersmen lives. The commanders of the different military departments bordering on this territory, had, with the few men at their command, sent out during the summer several expeditions, as escorts to trains, but they had accomplished no more than to accord safety to their different charges, as the mode of Indian warfare is to only give battle when they have all of the advantages.\*

In the month of October, 1864, General James H. Carleton, then commanding the Department of New Mexico, believing that the Comanches and Kiowas might be found, on the south side of the Canadian river, in winter quarters, issued a general order, directing an expedition against these Indians. The command was ordered to consist as follows: Colonel Christopher Carson, (familiarly known as "Kit Carson,") First New Mexico Cavalry, commanding; Colonel Francisco P. Abreú, First New Mexico In-

\* At the reading of this paper, before the Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society, February 14th, 1877, a gentleman who had visited the Indian Territory immediately at the close of the War of the Rebellion, assured me that the supposition that the leaders of the late war had incited the Indians to commit their atrocities in 1864, was founded on fact, he having been so informed by several of the principal chiefs at that time.—G. H. P.



fantry; Major William McCleave, First California Cavalry; Captain Emil Fritz, Company B, First California Cavalry, one officer and forty enlisted men; Lieutenant Sullivan Heath, Company K, First California Cavalry, one officer and forty men; Captain Merriam, Company M, First California Cavalry, one officer and thirty-four men; Lieutenant George H. Pettis, Company K, First California Infantry, one officer and twenty-six men, with two twelve pounder mountain howitzers mounted on prairie carriages; Captain Charles Deus, Company M, First New Mexico Cavalry, two officers and seventy men; Captain Joseph Berney, Company D, First New Mexico Cavalry, two officers and thirty-six men; Company A, First California Veteran Infantry, seventy-five men; Assistant Surgeon George S. Court-right, United States Volunteers, and an officer, whose name escapes me, as Assistant Quartermaster and Commissary,—numbering, in all, fourteen officers and three hundred and twenty-one enlisted men. In addition to the command, Colonel Carson had induced seventy-two friendly Indians (Utes and Apaches), by promising them all the plunder that they



might acquire, to join the expedition. These Utes and Apaches are known among frontiersmen as "Mountain Indians," in contradistinction to the "Plain Indians," and make their homes in the Rocky Mountains, to the north and west of the Mexican town of Don Fernando de Taos. As Carson had been their agent at one time, and they knowing him well, he had little difficulty in inducing them to join him on an expedition against their old enemies.

The troops mentioned above were stationed at different posts in the Territory of New Mexico, and they were ordered to rendezvous at Fort Bascom, a frontier post on the Canadian river near the boundary line of Texas, on the fourth of November. The Quartermaster had received his supplies in a train of twenty-seven wagons and an ambulance, and the morning of the sixth of November found the command ready to stretch out, the horses having all been well shod, and after some difficulty in crossing the Canadian river, to the north side, the expedition was well on the war path before noon, and went into camp that night at the mouth of Ute creek, near the boundary line of New Mexico and Texas. From this



time the command moved on from day to day, with only such incidents as usually accompany such expeditions, except that it was a new country to most of us, as our campaigning had never extended to the plains before this time, we heretofore having operated against the Navajoe and Apache Indians in the immediate vicinity of the Rio Grande, extending our scouting at times into the eastern and northern parts of Arizona. On our third or fourth day out from Fort Bascom, we passed the vicinity where Kit Carson had, fifteen or twenty years before this time, pursued a marauding band of Comanches, who had attacked a wagon train near Fort Union in New Mexico; all the men of the train had been killed, including a Mr. White, an American, whose wife and child had been taken prisoners. Carson, who was in that vicinity at the time, organized a party and proceeded on the trail, and after several days, had come up to them at this point. They being well into their own country had not anticipated being pursued so far. The party of whites attacked them at early dawn, drove them from their camp, and found only the reeking bodies of Mrs. White and her child, still



warm, with their life's blood slowly ebbing away, the Indians having, as is usual with them, at the first sound of the attack, perforated the bodies of their prisoners with spears and arrows. Carson explained to us how their attack was made, the position of the Indian camp, where the bodies were found, etc., in his usual graphic manner.

The Indians with our command, on every night after making camp, being now on the war path, indulged in their war dance, which, although new to most of us, became almost intolerable, it being kept up each night until nearly daybreak, and until we became accustomed to their groans and howlings incident to the dance, it was impossible to sleep. Each morning of our march, two of our Indians would be sent ahead several hours before we started, who would return to camp at night and report. On the fifteenth we arrived and made camp at the Cañada de los Ruedes, or Wheel Gulch, so called from the fact that years before, when New Mexico was a State of old Mexico, the Mexican trains on their way to the States for goods, with their *carretas*, or ox carts, usually remained over here for repairs,



and as the cottonwood trees were larger than at any other point on their route, they could obtain such a supply of new wheels as their necessities required—hence the name of "Cañada de los Ruedes."

We had up to this time followed on the old Mexican road from New Mexico, the first party that had passed over it for years, as it had been long in disuse, the usual route being by way of the Cimmaron and Arkansas rivers, several hundred miles farther north. Near this point, the old wagon road left the valley of the Canadian, and turned abruptly to the north, while we, keeping to the right, found an old, unused Indian trail, which kept in the direction of the Canadian. We had been fortunate in having good weather, for the season of the year, and something very unusual in scouting on the frontier, we had been successful in finding plenty of water, both for the men and for our animals.

On the afternoon of November twenty-fourth, after a short march of eighteen miles, we made camp at Mule Spring, having marched through the State of Texas and arrived in the western part of the Indian Territory. Up to this time no indications of



hostile Indians had been observed, although Carson made good use of his many years of frontier experience, by keeping his Indian scouts well out on either flank. We had arrived at Mule Spring early in the afternoon; had performed our usual camp duties, and as the sun was about setting, many of us being at supper, we were surprised to see our Indians, who were lying around the camp, some gambling, some sleeping, and others waiting for something to eat from the soldiers' mess, spring to their feet, as if one man, and gaze intently to the eastward, talking in their own language quite excitedly. Upon questioning Colonel Carson, why this tumult among our Indians, he informed us that the two scouts that he had dispatched that morning, had found the Comanches, and were now returning to report the particulars. Although the returning scouts were at least two miles distant, and, mounted on their ponies, were hardly discernible, yet the quick, sharp eye of our Indians made them out without difficulty. I must confess that I failed to see them, until an Indian pointed out to me, away off on the hill-side, two mere specks moving towards our



camp. And what was more remarkable, they had, by a single shout, in that rarefied, electrical atmosphere, conveyed the intelligence that they had found the enemy, and that work was to be done. But a short time elapsed before the two scouts arrived, and rode leisurely through camp, without answering any questions or giving any information, until they had found the Colonel, when they reported that they had, about ten miles in advance, found indications that a large body of Indians had moved that morning, with a very large herd of horses and cattle, and that we would have no difficulty in finding all the Indians that we desired. Carson immediately ordered all the cavalry, and the section of mountain howitzers, to be ready to move without delay. The Infantry, Company A, First California Infantry, under command of Colonel Abreu, was ordered to remain as escort to the wagon train, which was to stay in camp that night, and on the morrow was to move on and follow the trail of the command, until they overtook it.

Just before dark, Carson, with his command, moved out of camp, in light marching order, with



strict orders that, during the night march, there should be no talking or smoking. Before twelve, we had descended again into the valley of the Canadian, which we had left four days before, and had also found in the dark, the deep-worn, fresh trail of the hostile Indians. At this time we believed that we were in the immediate vicinity of the enemy, and as nothing of their position was known to us, it was deemed prudent to remain where we were, and move on again just before daylight. This halt was very tedious. As I said before, no talking was allowed, (the few orders that were necessary, were given in a whisper,) lighting of pipes and smoking was prohibited; each officer and soldier upon halting, only dismounted, and remained holding his horse by the bridle rein until morning; and to add to our discomforts a heavy frost fell during the night.

As the first grey streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern skies, we mounted our horses, and proceeded on our new-found trail. Our order of march was, first on the right, Colonel Carson in company with the Utes and Apaches, who generally kept no regular order; next came about one-half of the cav-



alry force; then the section of mountain howitzers; the balance of the cavalry bringing up the rear. We had been moving but a few minutes, when I was informed that Carson wished to see me at the head of the column. I urged my horse forward as quietly as I could, and reported to him. As I did so, I remarked the funny appearance of his Indians, all of whom were mounted in their own peculiar manner, with their knees drawn up nearly at right angles, and being cold, they were each of them enveloped in their buffalo robes, standing high above their heads, and fastened by a belt at their waist. Such a sight was ludicrous in the extreme. Carson commenced to say to me, in his own quaint way: "I had a dream the night before, of being engaged with a large number of Indians; your cannons were firing,"—at this point of his recital, we heard a voice in Spanish, on the opposite side of the river, cry out "Bene-acá," "Bene-acá,"—"Come here," "Come here." We knew that we had found a picket of the enemy. Carson hastily ordered Major McCleave, and B Company California Cavalry, with one of the New Mexican detachments, to cross the river, as it



was easily forded. Our Indians, who had been riding leisurely along, at the first cry charged into a clump of chapparel which was near by, and in a moment, as it seemed, came riding out again, completely divested of buffalo robes and all their clothing, with their bodies covered with war paint, and war feathers in abundance, and giving a war-whoop they dashed wildly into the river towards the enemy. I was wondering at the wonderful transformation of our Indians, entirely forgetful of the enemy, when Carson gave orders for us to move down on our side of the river, he being satisfied that the village would be found within a short distance.

A few shots were fired on the opposite side of the river, and we soon saw by the early morning light, the enemy's picket, consisting of three mounted Indians, rushing madly on, followed by the detachments that had been sent over. We had proceeded but a short distance, when Carson ordered our force to move on more rapidly, and strike the Indian village before they should become fully alarmed, while he himself, with Lieutenant Heath's detachment, remained as escort to the battery, the carriages of



which were so small that the cannoneers could not be mounted, consequently they could not move as fast as the rest of the command, which was composed entirely of cavalry, it being remembered that the infantry had remained behind the night before, at Mule Creek, as escort to the wagon train. It was not long before the cavalry had disappeared from our sight, as we were now in the middle of the rich valley of the Canadian river, which was here about two miles in width, with occasional clumps of cottonwood trees, and covered with tall dry grass, in many places high above our heads when mounted on our horses. In fact, I remember that several times during that morning, when riding with Colonel Carson, and keeping up a conversation, we could not see each other, the tall dry grass intervening. This tall grass and an occasional clump of drift-wood, which had been formed by previous freshets of the river, made hard work for us to get along with the mountain howitzers. The carriages having low wheels, and tracking very narrow, the most constant care and attention would not prevent their occasional capsizing and consequent delay in righting up again.



We were an hour probably in getting through this wilderness, and getting out on to clear, hard, unobstructed earth again, by which time we could hear, far in advance, rifle shots thick and fast. The quick, sharp command, "Trot—MARCH," would be given to the battery, which would move out at a trot for a few hundred yards, when the dismounted cannoneers would soon be left stringing out a long way to the rear; "Walk—MARCH," would be resumed, so as to allow the men to regain their places, and after allowing them a short time to regain their breath, the same movements would be again and again performed.

At about nine o'clock, the firing in our advance, which was becoming more rapid, seemed to be moving forward faster than we were, or rather it seemed, that every minute, the distance between ourselves and the firing parties was becoming wider, yet we were all the time advancing. We now came upon a large number of cattle, belonging to the Kiowas, that were quietly browsing on the plain, entirely oblivious of war's destruction in their midst. Shortly after, we saw a number of our Indians, each having



his own separate herd of from twenty to fifty of the enemy's ponies, and on getting them a short distance away from each other, each would single out one of the best of his respective herd, dismount, and placing his riding outfit upon his new steed, would leave his own worn out pony to mark his individual property, expecting that the fight would be over in a few minutes, when they were to return, and according to their terms of contract for the campaign, each would have his own separate herd of horses, which he had collected, and which was marked by the horse left by him.

A long low hill, running from the foothills across the valley of the Canadian to the river, which was here forced to the opposite side of the valley, next met our view, over the top of which could be seen a large number of what I supposed to be Sibley tents from their shape and whiteness, and I so expressed my opinion to Colonel Carson, who informed me that they were Indian lodges made of buffalo hide, whitened by a process practiced by all the Indians on the plains. I do not remember of having been deceived at any time as I was by these lodges ; posi-



tive I was that they were Sibley tents, and this opinion was also that of my enlisted men—buffalo lodges are not used by the mountain Indians—but in the next minute we passed through the centre of this village, when we were fully satisfied.

Our advance, which was a long way ahead of us, had surprised the Kiowas in their lodges which formed this village. The bucks or males had seized their weapons and ammunition and retreated down the river followed by our men, the women and children, before we came up, had also deserted the village and were hidden in the foothills on our left, which we knew nothing of, unfortunately, as they had an American woman and two children with them, being the widow and children of a sergeant of Colorado volunteers who had been killed in the early part of the season in western Kansas.

The firing continued in our front. Carson said to me that we should proceed, and if the fight was not over when we arrived it would soon be, when we would all return and burn the lodges. At the same time, he threw his heavy military overcoat on a bush alongside the road, and advised me to do the same,



as we should return in a few minutes and get them again. I did not do it, however. Some of my men wished to take their overcoats and blankets from the guns and leave them, but I would not allow them to do so, and for once, my judgment was better than Carson's, for he never saw that coat of his again, while my own and those of my men did good service afterwards. But as we pushed on, the firing seemed no nearer, until after we had made about four miles from the village, when we saw our men, dismounted and deployed as skirmishers, with their horses corralled in an old, deserted, adobe building, known by all frontiersmen as the Adobe Walls. When we were within about a thousand yards of this point, Carson, with Lieutenant Heath and his detachment, put spurs to their horses and charged forward to join in the fray. My men seemed to get new life, and forgot all their fatigues, at the prospect of going into action, and but a few minutes elapsed before we came into the centre of the field at a gallop, and touching my cap to Carson, I received from him the following order: "Pettis, throw a few shell into that crowd over thar." The



next moment, "Battery, halt! action right,—load with shell—LOAD!" was ordered.

It was now near ten o'clock in the morning, the sky was not obscured by a single cloud, and the sun was shining in all its brightness. Within a hundred yards of the corralled horses in the Adobe Walls, was a small symmetrical conical hill of twenty-five or thirty feet elevation, while in all directions extended a level plain. Carson, McCleave, and a few other officers, occupied the summit, when the battery arrived and took position nearly on the top. Our cavalry was dismounted and deployed as skirmishers in advance, lying in tall grass, and firing an occasional shot at the enemy. Our Indians, mounted and covered with paint and feathers, were charging backwards and forwards and shouting their war cry, and in their front were about two hundred Comanches and Kiowas, equipped as they themselves were, charging in the same manner, with their bodies thrown over the sides of their horses, at a full run, and shooting occasionally under their horses' necks, while the main body of the enemy, numbering twelve or fourteen hundred, with a dozen or more chiefs rid-



ing up and down their line haranguing them, seemed to be preparing for a desperate charge on our forces. Surgeon Courtright had prepared a corner of the Adobe Walls for a hospital, and was busy, with his assistants, in attending to the wants of half a dozen or more wounded. Fortunately, the Adobe Walls were high enough to protect all our horses from the enemy's rifles, and afford ample protection to our wounded. Within a mile of us, beyond the enemy, in full and complete view, was a Comanche village of over five hundred lodges, which, with the village that we had captured, made about seven hundred lodges, which allowing two fighting Indians to a lodge, which is the rule on the frontier, would give us fourteen hundred warriors in the field before us.

This was the prospect when the battery came on the ground. A finer sight I never saw before, and probably shall never see again. The Indians seemed to be astonished when the pieces came up at a gallop and were being unlimbered. The pieces were loaded in a few seconds after the order was given, and were sighted by the gunners, when the command "Number one—FIRE!" was given, followed quickly by "Num-



ber two—FIRE!" At the first discharge, every one of the enemy, those that were charging backwards and forwards on their horses but a moment before as well as those that were standing in line, rose high in their stirrups and gazed, for a single moment, with astonishment, then guiding their horses' heads away from us, and giving one concerted, prolonged yell, they started in a dead run for their village. In fact when the fourth shot was fired there was not a single enemy within the extreme range of the howitzers. Colonel Carson now assured us that the fighting was over, and that the enemy would not make another stand, and gave orders that after a short halt, to allow the men to eat something and to water our horses, as neither man nor beast had received any nourishment since supper time the day before, we were to proceed and capture the Comanche village before us. Accordingly the skirmishers were called in, the cavalry horses were unsaddled, the artillery horses unhitched from the pieces, and all taken a hundred yards or more in our rear, to as fine a running brook of clear cold water as I ever saw on the frontiers. The horses were allowed to drink their



fill, and then each one was picketed with a long lariat, or rope, to eat high, rich, uncropped grass. This accomplished, the officers and men proceeded to fish from the inmost recesses of their haversacks, such pieces of raw bacon and broken hard-bread as they had been fortunate enough to capture the night before on leaving the wagons. Each one had something to relate about the day's conflict, and each one was anxious to know what was to be the result of the day's operations.

Less than half an hour had elapsed, and Carson had not, as yet, given the order to saddle up, when the enemy were returning and seemed to be anxious to renew the conflict. Presently the order came to saddle up, the artillery horses were hitched in again, the cavalry horses returned to the inside of the Adobe Walls, the sharp, quick whiz of the Indians' rifle balls was again heard, the cavalymen were deployed as before, and the fight was going on again in earnest.

During this fight, which lasted all the afternoon, the howitzers were fired but a few times, as the enemy were shrewd enough to know that their policy



was to act singly and avoid getting into masses, although the detachments were kept on the field in the most exposed situations. At one of the discharges, the shell passed directly through the body of a horse on which was a Comanche riding at a full run, and went some two or three hundred yards further on before it exploded. The horse, on being struck, went head-foremost to earth, throwing his rider, as it seemed, twenty feet into the air with his hands and feet sprawling in all directions, and as he struck the earth, apparently senseless, two other Indians who were near by, proceeded to him, one on each side, and throwing themselves over on the sides of their horses, seized each an arm and dragged him from the field between them, amid a shower of rifle balls from our skirmishers. This act of the Indians in removing their dead and helpless wounded from the field is always done, and more than a score of times were we eye-witnesses to this feat during the afternoon. General G. A. Custer, in his "Life on the Plains," says of this Indian custom, in giving an account of an Indian fight near Fort Wallace, in 1867: "Those of the savages who were shot from



their saddles were scarcely permitted to fall to the ground, before a score or more of their comrades dashed to their rescue, and bore their bodies beyond the possible reach of our men. This is in accordance with the Indian custom in battle. They will risk the lives of a dozen of their best warriors to prevent the body of any one of their number from falling into the white man's possession. The reason for this is the belief, which generally prevails among all the tribes, that if a warrior loses his scalp, he forfeits his hope of ever reaching the happy hunting ground."

But to return again to my story: Quite a number of the enemy acted as skirmishers, being dismounted and hid in the tall grass in our front, and made it hot for most of us by their excellent marksmanship, while quite the larger part of them, mounted and covered with their war dresses, charged continually across our front, from right to left and *vice versa*, about two hundred yards from our line of skirmishers, yelling like demons, and firing from under the necks of their horses at intervals. About two hundred yards in rear of their line, all through the fighting



at the Adobe Walls, was stationed one of the enemy who had a cavalry bugle, and during the entire day he would blow the opposite call that was used by the officer in our line of skirmishers. For instance, when our bugles sounded the "advance," he would blow "retreat"; and when ours sounded the "retreat," he would follow with the "advance"; ours would signal "halt"; he would follow suit. So he kept it up all the day, blowing as shrill and clearly as our very best buglers. Carson insisted that it was a white man, but I have never received any information to corroborate this opinion. All I know is, that he would answer our signals each time they were sounded, to the infinite merriment of our men, who would respond with shouts of laughter each time he sounded his horn.

The course of the river could be discerned eastwardly at least a dozen miles, and there were several of the enemy's villages in that direction. We could see them approaching all the afternoon, in parties of from five to fifty, and it was estimated that there were at least three thousand Indians opposed to us,—more than ten to one. During the



afternoon, parties of the enemy could be seen at a distance of two or three miles on either side, going to the village that we passed through in the morning, and they succeeded in getting all the stock that they had left, in securing such valuables as had been left by them in their lodges, and they also secured their women and children and carried them to places of safety.

The safety of our own wagon train now began to be considered, as there were only seventy-five men left with it, and it was feared that it might be captured by the large number of Indians that had passed to our rear. The most of our officers were anxious to press on and capture the village immediately in our front, and Carson was at one time about to give orders to that effect, when our Indians prevailed upon him to return and completely destroy the village that we had already captured, and after finding our supply train, replenishing our ammunition, and leaving our wounded, we could come back again and finish this village to our satisfaction. After some hesitation and against the wishes of most of his officers, at about half-past three Carson gave orders



to bring out the cavalry horses, and formed a column of fours,—the number four man of each set of fours to lead the other three horses,—with the mountain howitzers to bring up the rear of the column. The balance of the command was thrown out as skirmishers on the front, rear and on both flanks, and we commenced our return march. The enemy was not disposed to allow us to return without molestation, and in a very few minutes was attacking us on every side. By setting fire to the high, dry grass of the river bottom they drove us to the foot-hills, and by riding in rear of the fire as it came burning towards us, they would occasionally get within a few yards of the column; being enveloped in the smoke, they would deliver the fire of their rifles and get out of harm's way before they could be discovered by us.

During the morning's fight at the Adobe Walls, a young Mexican boy, about eighteen or nineteen years of age, belonging to one of the New Mexican companies, was out on the line of skirmishers, and as he was crawling forward, in reaching out his right hand he placed it over the hole of a rattlesnake and was bitten on the little finger. He passed near me,



as he came away from the line to find the Surgeon, and as he was holding up his hand, I supposed that he was wounded in that member, and said to him in Spanish, "Que hay ! que tienes?"—"Here you, what's the matter?" He replied, "Un bibora!"—"Rattlesnake." He passed into the Adobe Walls, where the Surgeon was located, who dressed his hand and gave him a good stiff drink of whiskey. In a few minutes he returned to the skirmish line, where he remained until our return. His company was now on our left flank, and after we had completed about a mile of our return march, a Comanche rode up to us in a cloud of smoke, when a sudden gust of wind left him completely exposed within twenty feet of the boy who had been bitten by the snake. They both, at the same moment, brought their rifles to their cheeks. The Indian fired a second before the other, and missed his mark,—the boy immediately returned the fire, hit his enemy in some vital part, (he instantly fell from off his horse,) and rushed forward to secure his scalp. Some ten or fifteen of the Comanches who were near, saw their friend fall and rushed forward on their horses to secure the body



and bear it away out of our reach, as they had done a great many times during the day. The comrades of the Mexican soldier went to his assistance, kept the enemy at bay until he had finished the scalping operation, and then returned to their places in the skirmish line. This boy took the only scalp that our party secured during the whole day's fight. During this return march the howitzer in rear of the column succeeded in getting in a shell three several times on groups of the enemy.

Just before sundown we reached the village, which we found full of Indians trying to save their property from destruction. A couple of shells, followed by a charge of our men, drove them into the far end of it, when the work of destruction commenced, about half of the command being detailed to set fire to the lodges, while the rest of us were to keep the enemy in check. A small sand hill about twenty feet high was taken advantage of for the howitzers, and served as earthworks for the detachment. The pieces were loaded at the foot of the hill, and at the command of "By hand, to the front," they were pushed to the top, when the gunner would aim the



piece, and at the command "ready" number four would insert the friction primer, and lying on his stomach, with no part of his body exposed, would wait for the command to fire. The piece on being fired would recoil, sometimes tumbling over and over and at others coming down fairly on the wheels to the bottom of the hill, when the other piece, having been loaded meanwhile, would be moved to the top and fired in its turn. The lodges were found to be full of plunder, including many hundreds of finely finished buffalo robes. Every man in the command took possession of one or more of these, while the balance were consumed in the lodges. There were found some white women's clothing, as well as articles of children's clothing, and several photographs; also a cavalry sergeant's hat, with letter and cross-sabres, cavalry sabre and belts, etc., being the accoutrements of the Colorado volunteer sergeant of which I have spoken before. We also burned an army ambulance and government wagon, with several sets of harnesses, which the Kiowas had retained from some wagon train they had captured during the previous summer.



I had forgotten to mention that with our seventy-two Utes and Apaches there were two old squaws, and the purpose for which they had accompanied the party had been a mystery to our men, but we ascertained now. It is well known to all frontiersmen that the mutilation of dead bodies (and they are often found mutilated so indecently that I cannot describe it here—a dozen times or more I have been eye-witness to this kind of mutilation myself,) is always the work of the squaws. When we passed the village in the morning, these two squaws were in these lodges, unknown to us, seeking for plunder. In the course of their search, they had found two old, decrepit, blind Kiowas and two cripples, who were unable to get out of their lodges when they were deserted by their people, and our two squaws soon placed them *hors-du-combat*, by cleaving their heads with axes. All four of these were found by our men when they were burning the village, the squaws themselves showing the men where they were, and claiming the merit of their slaughter.

The Comanches and Kiowas were driven from



lodge to lodge to the southern extremity of the village, and on reaching the last one, the party, numbering some thirty or forty, mounted their horses, and at a run made from us towards the river, a twelve-pounder shell, the last shot fired in the fight, exploding in their midst, as a parting salute, just as the sun was setting in the western horizon. The work of destruction was soon finished,—every one of the one hundred and seventy-six lodges, with their contents, were consumed, together with the ambulance, wagon and harnesses before mentioned.

It was some time after dark when the cavalymen had mounted their horses and had formed the column to return. The two gun carriages and the two ammunition carts were loaded with the most severely wounded, while the slightly wounded retained their horses. The march now became the most unpleasant part of the day's operations. The wounded were suffering severely; the men and horses were completely worn out; the enemy might attack us at any moment, unseen; and the uncertainty of the whereabouts and condition of our wagon train, for you will remember that we were now nearly two hundred and



fifty miles from the nearest habitation, or hopes of supply, with the whole Comanche and Kiowa nations at our heels,—all combined to make it anything but a pleasant situation to be in. We had been moving slowly on our return from the destroyed village about three hours, when we saw away off on our right several camp fires burning dimly, and approaching cautiously, we were soon welcomed by the challenge of a sentinel, in good, clear, ringing Saxon, "Who comes there?" This was answered by our men with cheers, for we were now assured that our supply train was intact, and that starvation would be averted for a season at least. But a few minutes elapsed before we were in camp, the Surgeon made the wounded as comfortable as possible, the horses were unsaddled and unhitched from the pieces and fastened to the picket line, a double guard was put on, and then for blankets and sleep, hunger being forgotten in our weariness.

This ended the day's work. The command had been nearly thirty hours marching and fighting, with an intermission of less than half an hour, and with no other refreshment than that afforded by a single



hard-bread, and small piece of salt pork. The casualties of the day on our part were but two killed, privates John O'Donnell and John Sullivan, of Company M, First California Cavalry, with twenty-one wounded, two or three of whom died afterwards from the effects of their wounds. One of our Utes was killed and four wounded. The loss to the Comanches and Kiowas, was their village of one hundred and seventy-six lodges, buffalo robes, and all of their winter's provisions, with nearly one hundred killed, and between one hundred and one hundred and fifty wounded.

Our wagon train had left camp at Mule Creek very early in the morning, had followed our trail as well as they could, and all day long had heard the howitzers each time they were fired. They knew that we were engaged with the enemy, and the train was kept in continuous motion, hoping to reach us before the day closed; but night set in on them, and Colonel Abreu selected a good place for defence and went into camp where we found them, they not having been molested by the Indians, although several parties were seen by them during the day.



As the usual time for an Indian attack is just before daybreak, reveille was sounded at an early hour on the morning of the twenty-sixth, the command was distributed for an attack, but the sun soon rose upon us awaiting the onset. As none of the enemy were discovered, the officers and men, now that they had been refreshed by undisturbed slumber, bethought themselves of their stomachs, and I doubt if there was ever a heartier breakfast disposed of; all of the wild turkeys and antelope meat on hand were devoured,—calling upon the hunters to do their duty again. Our Indians were so tired the night before that they adjourned their "scalp dance," and sought the comfort of their buffalo robes; but, as we had been entertained every night until the fight by their "war dance," so for twenty-one days after, or as long as they remained with us, the monotony of the march was diversified by their own peculiar "scalp dance," and that with only one scalp, which they had purchased of the Mexican soldier whose exploit I have before mentioned.

We remained in camp during the day to allow the men and animals to recuperate, and never was needed



rest more welcome. The enemy did not seem disposed to molest us, but remained in full view, on an eminence about two miles to the eastward of us. The only incident of the day worthy of mention was, that during the afternoon two of our Indians, mounted, rode out leisurely on the plain towards the Comanches; presently two of the enemy left their party and rode towards us, when another party of ten or a dozen left our camp, and then the same number left the camp of the enemy, like boys playing at goal, and then another party from our camp, followed by a like party from the enemy, until there were over two hundred men of both sides moving at a walk towards each other in the centre of the plain. The leading parties of each side had approached each other until only about two hundred yards of space intervened, when shooting commenced, but before a dozen shots had been exchanged the entire body of the enemy turned their horses' heads towards their camp, and left on a run, followed by our people for a short distance, who afterwards returned to camp unharmed.

Reveille was sounded early on the morning of the



twenty-seventh, and after breakfast orders were issued by Colonel Carson to saddle up, and commence the return march, much to the surprise and dissatisfaction of all the officers, who desired to go to the Comanche village that we had been in sight of on the day of the fight. It was learned afterwards that our Indians had advised Carson to return, and without consulting his officers the order was given and we commenced our return march.

We arrived at Fort Bascom on or about the twentieth of December without being molested by the enemy, where we remained a few days, when orders were received from the Department Commander for the different detachments to return to various posts in the Territory, and as the term of enlistment of the most of the men of my detachment had expired, I was ordered to Fort Union, where we arrived shortly after, on New Year's day, 1865.

General Orders, No. 4, Department of New Mexico, dated Headquarters, Santa Fé, N. M., February 18, 1865, which gives a detailed account of every operation with the Indians in that department for the entire year of 1864, says, on page 10, under date of November twenty-fifth :—



"Colonel Christopher Carson, First Cavalry, New Mexico Volunteers, with a command consisting of fourteen commissioned officers and three hundred and twenty-one enlisted men and seventy-five Indians,—Apaches and Utes—attacked a Kiowa village of about one hundred and fifty lodges, near the Adobe Fort, on the Canadian river, in Texas; and, after a severe fight, compelled the Indians to retreat, with a loss of sixty killed and wounded. The village was then destroyed. The engagement commenced at 8.30 A. M., and lasted without intermission until sunset.

"In this fight, privates John O'Donnell and John Sullivan, of Company M, First Cavalry, California Volunteers, were killed, and Corporal N. Newman, privates Thomas Briggs, J. Jamison, — Mapes, Jaspar Vincent and J. Horsley, of Company B, and — Holygrapher, of Company G, First Cavalry, California Volunteers, Antonio Duro and Antonio Qauches, of Company M, and H. Romero, of Company I, First Cavalry, New Mexico Volunteers, were wounded. Four Utes were wounded.

"Colonel Carson, in his report mentions the following officers as deserving the highest praise: Major McCleave, Captain Fritz and Lieutenant Heath, of the First Cavalry, California Volunteers; Captains Deus and Berney, First Cavalry, New Mexico Volunteers; Lieutenant Pettis, First Infantry, California Volunteers; Lieutenant Edgar, First Cavalry, New Mexico Volunteers, and Assistant Surgeon George T. Courtright, United States Volunteers.

"The command destroyed one hundred and fifty lodges of the best manufacture, a large amount of dried meats, berries, buffalo robes, powder, cooking utensils, etc., also, a buggy and



spring wagon, the property of 'Sierrito,' or 'Little Mountain,' the Kiowa Chief."

In 1867, about three years after the events narrated here, I was residing in a little Mexican village on the Rio Grande, Los Algodones, about forty-five miles south of Santa Fé, where I became acquainted with a couple of Mexicans who were trading with the Comanche and Kiowa Indians in the fall of 1864, and they informed me that they were at the Comanche village which we were in sight of, and that when the fight commenced they were held as prisoners and kept so for several days after we left that neighborhood; that in the village on the day of the fight there were seven white women and several white children, prisoners; they also informed me where the women and children of the village were hid when we passed through the Kiowa village on the morning of the fight, and that our enemy sustained a loss on that day, of nearly a hundred killed and between one hundred and one hundred and fifty wounded, making a difference with the official report, which guessed at thirty killed and thirty wounded. They also said that the Indians claimed



that if the whites had not had with them the two "guns that shot twice," referring to the shells of the mountain howitzers, they would never have allowed a single white man to escape out of the valley of the Canadian, and I may say, with becoming modesty, that this was also the often expressed opinion of Colonel Carson.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No 6.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.



## A TRIP TO RICHMOND AS PRISONER OF WAR.

[*Read before the Society November 15th, 1876.*]

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MR. PRESIDENT, AND COMRADES :

I am not going to give you a tale of horrors this evening, as might perhaps be inferred from the title of this paper, but a simple, truthful account of the scenes and incidents of a trip to Richmond as prisoner of war—a trip which, however I may have felt about it at the time, and however strange such an assertion may seem, I now look back upon as of the pleasantest memories of four years service. It may be stated here that I was wounded and captured in a cavalry charge at Brandy Station, Virginia, on the ninth of June, 1863, [being then a corporal in Company G, First Maine Cavalry,] at a time when the prisoners of the two armies were being paroled



freely, and a flag-of-truce boat was carrying rebel paroled prisoners to City Point and bringing back Union paroled prisoners, almost every week, which accounts for the short term of my imprisonment. A month or so later, at Gettysburg, if memory serves me rightly, a hitch occurred in the exchange of prisoners, and for months after, the poor boys in southern prisons had little hope of escape except by death or the end of the war. Neither will I attempt to give you an account of the engagement in which I was captured, for none but a master hand can draw a faithful picture of a cavalry charge—to enjoy the excitement of which is well worth all its risks—but simply saying that it was one of the first real cavalry contests of the war, and a contest which taught the Southern cavaliers to at least respect their Northern foes, I will commence my story with the moment I found myself wounded and a prisoner, near a lively rebel battery on which we had charged. (I will say, in passing, that the battle-flag flying over that battery bore the legend "Hampton's Legion.")

Some of you can doubtless understand my feelings at the moment I found myself a prisoner, from



your own experiences. Never was the transition from the wildest excitement and the highest inflation of spirits to a feeling of thorough despondency and heartsickness more sudden and complete. A thousand different kinds of thoughts crowded through my mind at once. Visions of Libby Prison and Belle Isle, with all their attendant miseries, passed in mental review, together with the sufferings and weary waiting, the hoping against hope, of loved ones at home as day after day passed with no word from their missing soldier boy. But I need not dwell on this; too well and too deeply are like experiences rooted in many of your memories. Nor had I long to dwell upon it at that time. Present and imperative matters, and dusty, war-begrimmed men in grey demanded my attention. My revolver was given up as a matter of course, as also were belt, sabre and ammunition. A moment I was alone, and with hopes of escape I put spurs to my horse for a trial, only to find it hopeless and to lose by the operation the chance I before had of riding instead of walking; for a pleasant-looking reb pleasantly informed me that he couldn't trust me on "that yere horse any



more." I was dismounted and ordered to the rear of one of the cannon, where I found several of my comrades had already been gathered, among whom was Sergeant George E. Jumper of my own company, with the sorriest countenance I have seen before or since. He had already paid a two months' visit to Libby and Belle Isle, and knew better than the rest of us what being a prisoner meant; for, though every one of us had learned much of the treatment of our boys in rebel prisons, the half never has been, never can be told. As I approached him I was ordered to give up my carbine, which was still slung to my shoulder, and which my captor had neglected to take in his hurry or I to notice in the excitement. With the most woe-begone expression imaginable, and the most disconsolate manner and tone, Jumper turned to me and said, "You might as well give it up, Tobe; it won't do you any good now." In spite of the surroundings I could not help laughing at him. A moment or two later a comrade and townsman, George L. Duston by name, arrived there with one hand bloody and in the air, and full a dozen kinds of expression on his face. He had been



wounded in the head and in the leg, and though terribly worried as to what he should do if the bullet had gone into his brain, was somewhat encouraged when I told him I was also wounded and he thus learned that he had a companion in misery. An order to leave the battery put an end to our mutual attempts at condolence. An officer put us into "two rows," and we were just about starting when a little, insignificant-looking reb rode up, and with pistol at my head demanded, "Here, Yank, give me them spurs, please!" Such politeness was overpowering, and he got the spurs.

After marching a mile or two in a dozen different directions, we reached Brandy Station, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, which gave the fight its name. Here we found a large collection of blue jacket prisoners, and the number was increasing. Here was a large number of the enemy's wounded, a sight which rather did us good to see. Here were guards, equal in number, almost, to the prisoners, and here, also, were bummers without number. The rebel soldiers, that is, the real fighting men from the front, treated us, as a general thing, kindly and with



true soldierly courtesy; they were anxious to "trade us out of" any articles of clothing, knives, watches, or anything we desired to sell, and quite a traffic sprang up there in a moment. But the bummers, the coffee-coolers and dog-robbers, the thousand-and-one hangers-on around an army, plundered the prisoners at every opportunity, from which the better men and officers protected us as well as they were able. I remember seeing the officer in charge of us draw his sabre on one who was taking a hat from one of us. I also remember seeing Bill Wyman robbed of a watch, which the officer in vain endeavored to recover for him. Bill objected strongly, and loudly threatened, "If ever I do get back to my regiment, and if ever I do get hold of a prisoner that has a watch, he won't have it long; I'll make that square." While waiting here I discovered my old grey horse, ridden by a man in grey who had been tamed by a Yankee bullet, and having due regard for my immediate future welfare, I made bold to approach him with a request that I might take some things from my saddle-bags, which he granted I thought with surprising readiness, the explanation of



which I imagined I understood when I found the saddle-bags had been perfectly gone through. I won't impeach the character of my newly found friend by intimating that that was the reason of his ready accession to my request, for he allowed me to take my haversack, which was attached to the saddle and contained a liberal quantity of good old army coffee, half of which I transferred to his possession in my gratitude, and got most thoroughly thanked in his return gratitude.

We learned that we were to be taken to Culpepper Court House, some six miles away. Perhaps half an hour's rest we got when we again started, the more severely wounded being given horses to ride as far as it was possible to do so. We now marched for some time without incident; a comrade, who kindly staid by me, and myself gradually falling behind the main body of the captive squad, as my wound began to grow stiff and walking difficult and painful. Of course we kept a body guard with us, who proved to be a pair of kind-hearted soldiers, though rebels, and who did all in their power to render the march less irksome. I was in the act of



drinking from the canteen hanging at the saddle of one of our guardians, when a quick, sharp exclamation at him from his comrade, who was the other side of me and a short distance away, caused me to drop the canteen in a hurry, supposing my friendly guard was to be censured for this kindness. A moment later that delusion was dispelled, as number two rode back to number one, remarking, in an undertone, "Carry your carbine ! here comes General Lee." In an instant our jovial comrades of this, to us, forced march, were transformed into stern guards ; the carbines were brought to a "carry," their bodies were straightened in their saddles and all the soldierly look at their command put on, while poor we were forced to assume a position more resembling prisoners, though we walked as straight and looked as defiantly as possible. The whole affair passed quickly and was amusing as showing the similarity of soldiers the world over. Of course we were eager to behold the rebel chieftain, and we were soon gratified. He rode by us but a few feet distant, accompanied by two or three of his staff, and we obtained an excellent view of him. My recollection of



him is—rather tall, straight, hair and whiskers slightly tinged with grey, plainly and neatly dressed in the rebel uniform, without epaulets or any show or ornament, his insignia of rank visible only on close scrutiny, and every motion soldierly.

In due time we overtook the remainder of the prisoners, who were resting just outside of Culpepper. But a few moments rest did we get before we were again moving, now enlivened and amused by the taunts and jeers, the exultations and threats of the boys, women, and old men of Culpepper, who had come out to escort the Yankee prisoners to their town. Not an able-bodied man or a soldier could be seen among the insulting crowd. As we turned a corner at the edge of the town we saw an old man whom but a short time before we had captured while on a reconnoissance and on account of his age and the apparent improbability of his being of any service to the confederacy, "swore him and let him go." As he stood there, happiness shining all over his face and his mouth doing lively duty in expressing his gratification at the sight of so many captured Yankees, we may be pardoned if for a moment we



regretted the leniency shown him at the time of his capture.

About dusk we reached the Court House building, where the able-bodied prisoners were quartered for an hour or two and then started for Richmond, while the wounded were taken to a church, and quartered for the night, it not being deemed humane to give them a night ride in their condition. We found at the church still more of our comrades—of the more seriously wounded, who had previously arrived in ambulances—and two or three able-bodied prisoners left there to care for the wounded as they were able. We were ordered not to leave the church, and informed that if any of us were found strolling about the streets we should be put in the guard house and not sent to Richmond with the others in time to take the next flag of truce boat for the North, which they said would go in a few days. This last consideration was enough to secure the best behavior on our part, though we had not implicit faith in it.

We were soon left alone for the night, and my old friend George Duston and myself curled ourselves together on the floor of the gallery and did out best



to get a night's sleep; but the strange events of the day, the change in our circumstances within a few hours, and the absence of the comforts of even a soldier's bed, all conspired against sleep, and morning found us but little refreshed. We spent the morning in washing, dressing our own and each others' wounds as well as we knew, and in various ways making ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Fortunately most of us had pipes and tobacco, and it is doubtful if the most inveterate hater of the filthy weed would have denied its beneficial effects upon us then, or shook his head at us as we enjoyed the real comfort it then afforded us. We now began to realize a fact which the excitement of the day before had driven from our minds, that we had eaten nothing for thirty-six hours, and that we had nothing to eat. Our haversacks had been attached to the saddles instead of carried on the person, and were lost, while my own was in the hands of an unwounded comrade, who had kindly volunteered to carry it for me after its return to me by the wounded rebel, and of whom I had neglected to take it when we were separated. We dared not venture far from the



church, of course, but near by was a negro hut where it was possible we might obtain a mouthful for a consideration. An examination of our finances disclosed the fact that both of us had less than two dollars. We visited the hut and found there a venerable dinah who had developed a remarkable aptitude at taking care of herself, as shown by her exorbitant rates for hoe-cake. She asserted that she was not allowed to accept Uncle Sam's currency, but an opportunity occurring for her to do so unnoticed, she demonstrated good financial judgment by receiving and concealing a small quantity of it, for which she gave us much more hoe-cake than she allowed for the same amount of Confederate scrip. This served to somewhat relieve the sense of goneness at the stomach, and when, about ten o'clock, we were furnished with an ample supply of soda crackers, we began to feel more resigned.

About noon two or three rebel surgeons came to attend to the more seriously wounded, apologizing for neglecting us so long by saying they had so many of their own wounded to attend to that they had not been able to reach us sooner, and had but little time



now. We were inclined to forgive their previous non-attendance, as there was grim satisfaction in knowing that some of our bullets had made misery as well as theirs.

We were visited during the day by many citizens of Culpepper, male and female, and the oft-repeated assertion that southern women were more severe and unkind in their treatment of prisoners than the men, and either much more so than the soldiers, was confirmed. Indeed, the latter almost invariably treated us with kindness, and as the true soldier always treats prisoners. Stonewall Jackson's old brigade and other troops were encamped in the vicinity, as well as a large force of the cavalry we had fought the day before, and officers and soldiers from the various commands were strolling around the village at pleasure, large numbers visiting the church to talk over affairs with us. Many and various were the discussions held in and around that church that day on the relative merits of the opposing armies, the right and wrong of either side, and the prospects of either's ultimate success. These were all carried on in good nature, and though at times the discussions



grew warm, and the bantering over this victory or that defeat was somewhat caustic, there was no ill-feeling displayed. This took up our attention and served to make the time pass much more pleasantly than would have been expected among a party of wounded prisoners, and if I apply the term "enjoyment" to the day as a whole, all soldiers will, I think, agree that the term is not misplaced.

As a party of us, in blue and grey, stood on the church stoop, two rebel cavalry officers rode up hastily, and drawing rein, one of them inquired, "Who was in command of the Yankee cavalry, yesterday, Stoneman?" He was told that Stoneman was away. "Well," he replied, "whoever he was, he outgeneralled Stuart, all to hell!" "What's that you say?" quickly spoke up another rebel officer, in a deprecating tone, to which he replied, deliberately, as if to give it more force, "I say whoever was in command of the Yankee cavalry yesterday, he outgeneralled Stuart, all to hell; he didn't whip him, but if he had had half the men Stuart had he would have whipped him, all to hell," and he rode away. Here, also, was consolation for us.



Several rebel soldiers remarked to me, "If you and I could have the say in this war, we'd settle it soon, I reckon," to which I readily assented, always with a mental reservation, "If you would give up," and I doubt not each inquirer made the same mental reservation. A young rebel who had been quietly listening to the various discussions, took me a little one side and said in a serious manner, "I want to ask you a question; don't you believe that the side that is right in this war will win in the end—not the side which you think is right, or which I think is right, but the side which is right in the sight of God?" "Most assuredly I do," I replied. "So do I," said he, "and that's about all the consolation I can get out of it." We fraternized, and for an hour I had a good square conversation with him on war matters, which I have no doubt did us both good. It certainly confirmed me in the belief that the greater part of the rank and file of the Confederate army—not the political or military leaders—were honest in the faith that they were doing and fighting for the right.

All kinds of rebels are represented in the memo-



ries of that day's experience. There were the conscientious rebels, fighting for their country as honestly and as loyally as were we ; there were the rampant, one-Southerner-is-as-good-as-five-Yankees rebels, with swagger and bluster ; there were the tenacious rebels, who would take to the woods and the mountains if by any possibility the Southern army should be defeated, and there forever defy the United States government ; there were the confident rebels, who could not conceive the possibility of a defeat of Confederate aspirations ; there were rebels who were rebels just because they were on Southern soil when the opportunity to enlist offered, "an' 'twas fight, sure, they wanted, with divil a care for the side, ony how" ; there were rebels from necessity, and rebels from choice ; then there were the old men and boys, women, etc.,—non-combatants—the meanest kind of rebels, who generally viewed us from afar off, which was as agreeable to us as to them.

Among others, was a young, jolly, rollicking Irishman, whose rations of whiskey had evidently not been short that morning, whose only pride was that



he belonged to Stonewall's old brigade—pride enough for him. Seating himself by George and myself, he entered into conversation. After listening awhile to the exploits of his brigade, George asked him why he was fighting for the Southern Confederacy, remarking that we had a large number of his countrymen fighting for us. "I know you have," said he; "the best fighting men of your army are the Irish. We've met your Irish brigade in battle a good many times. You always shove them to the front because you want to get them killed off. I've been at the North, and know how you all hate the Irish. I know something about your Know Nothings. I know how you have persecuted the Irish all through the North. Didn't you burn their churches at Bath and at Ellsworth, Maine, and at other places? Didn't you burn their convent at Charlestown, Massachusetts? And just because you hate them. Don't I know something about how you treat the Irish at the North? And don't you try to get them killed off by sending them to the front whenever you can? I know you have a good many Irish in your army, and I can't understand how they will fight for you, when you



have always treated them so." What could we say? While we of course did not agree with the alleged general Northern hatred of the Irish, we knew very well the facts of the destruction of the churches and convent stated, as two of them were in our own State, though we were surprised at having them thrown into our faces way down there under such circumstances, so we turned the conversation, well convinced 'twere no use to try to make him grieve for his allegiance.

Along towards night all but a few, who were too badly wounded for transportation, were taken to the depot and put aboard box cars in a train with the rebel wounded, to start for Richmond. And here I would do honor to one Southern woman, whose sable garments proclaimed what the war had cost her. She was at the train, passing cool water to the Southern wounded, with words of cheer and encouragement. We expected, of course, she would pass us coldly by, and would have deemed such action neither strange nor unusually unkind. But no! those of us who wished were served alike with her own friends, and some of us at least blessed the noble Southern



woman whose care for the soldier extended to friend and foe alike. We arranged ourselves in the car as comfortably as possible, and some time in the night arrived at Gordonsville, where we were taken into a hospital building by ourselves and given bunks with straw beds to sleep on, which we pronounced jolly, and soon most of us were sleeping as sweetly as though under the best of circumstances, and secured a good night's rest.

Next morning we were taken to the dining-room and given a breakfast of the light diet order. A small piece of bread and meat, both sweet and good, and a very small cup of coffee—made of rye we judged by the wry faces that followed the first sip—constituted the meal, and it was very welcome even if there was not very much of it. Every thing about the room and the tables was neat and clean, and I find in my diary of that day the following: "A better breakfast than we got at the Soldiers' Retreat, Washington, on our first arrival there, or than the first one I got at Fairfax Seminary Hospital, Alexandria, a year before."

We spent the day here very much as we did the



day before at Culpepper, though we were among a different class of men. The hospital was a large one, well-filled, and being mostly used as a convalescent hospital, there was the usual number of hospital bummers, convalescent shirks, etc. Still there were many true men and good soldiers here, who were only waiting an opportunity to rejoin their comrades in the field. A mere boy, not yet sixteen but a veteran of more than a year in the service, from the front the day before, sick, kindly inquired of a party with which I was if we had had enough to eat, and as kindly emptied his haversack of its hardtack for our benefit. It was all he could do, and we thoroughly appreciated the action. Trade was the prevailing mania, and Yankee example must have exerted a powerful influence here since the commencement of the war. Watches, knives, pipes, clothing, even—anything it was possible for a prisoner to have—the inmates of the hospital were anxious to “trade us out of,” and prices ruled high. My old, half worn-out government hat brought me a five dollar Confederate note. Watches were in good demand, but pocket-knives were at the highest premium. Indeed, the



inquiry for knives was so universal and so frequent that our curiosity was much excited as to the cause thereof, and George finally inquired why they were all so anxious to trade for a knife. "We can't get them here," was the answer; "they are very scarce with us." "How does that happen?" said George, and then, solving the question himself, he continued, "I don't believe you have got ingenuity enough in the whole Southern Confederacy to build a jack-knife." A muttered half-assent was the only reply. One of our number who, on being bantered as a Dutchman, said, "If I bees a Dutchman, or if I bees a Italian, or vat I bees, it makes no difference—I bees a First Maine cavalryman," who from having seen service in Italy, was known throughout the regiment as "Garribaldi," or "Garry" for short, had previous to his capture been enamored of the gay uniform of Hawkins' Zouaves, and by some means had become possessed of one in full. It now served him well, and before the close of the day he had been dressed in a complete suit of grey with forty dollars Confederate money in his pocket as perquisites, and was again clothed in Union blue, with



fifteen dollars more added to his funds—all done by swapping with the trader-hating Southerners.

In the afternoon we were put on board the cars to make another attempt to reach Richmond, leaving, as at Culpepper, one or two who were unable to proceed. We were now placed in what had once been a passenger car, but for economy of space or some other reason the seats had been taken out and narrow boards inserted at small intervals, thus allowing nearly twice as many passengers to the car and several times the discomforts. A well soldier might perhaps have accommodated himself to the situation and extracted some comfort out of the ride, but there was a poor prospect for a party of wounded ones to do so. However, with sagacity and strategy we put ourselves in the most favorable positions—on the seats, between them, along the aisles, and even on the platforms, sitting, reclining, and at as full length as wounds and circumstances would permit. There was plenty of room, but too much furniture. A guard with a musket sat at each door of the car, but we had by this time learned that rebel guards were soldiers and would treat us like soldiers,



and we were soon on as good terms with them as though they were old comrades. George's curiosity was excited, as it had been many times, at seeing Irishmen in rebel uniform, and he went for one of the guards with: "What are you fighting on this side for? We've a good many of your countrymen fighting on our side." "Ah, an' sure," was the reply, "if I'd been North I'd be fighting for the North, but my home was South, and wouldn't I fight for my home, anyhow?" George appeared satisfied.

Our few hours as fellow-travellers and fellow-sufferers had put the whole party on a social footing, and for a party of wounded prisoners it was as jolly a car-load, I dare say, as ever passed over the road. With joke and song, with story and speech, with bantering the guards and chaffing with the people at the stations as we halted for a moment, and with aiding and sympathizing with each other, the time passed quite pleasantly till we got to Louisa Court House. Here was fun. The train halted some time, and the people were at the station in full strength. A month before most of us "went through" that place on Stoneman's famous raid, and the cavalry



trimmings wore a familiar look to them. "Was you 'uns all down on Stoneman's raid?" was poured at us freely, to which it was gratification to reply that we were. Then did epithets, vulgar and profane, fly at us thick and fast, and in this pastime the women were more adept than the men. They even spat at us, and doubtless would have made due progress in scratching our eyes out but for our guards, who were true blue though clad in grey. They, evidently ashamed of such action on the part of those for whom they were serving, voluntarily assured us of protection, say what we please. A lively cross fire was kept up by us, and justice compels me to state that the language from the car stood higher in the scale of decency than that from the station, while it provoked ten times the irritation. We enjoyed it much, and were rather sorry than otherwise to see the train moving away from a spot affording so pleasing and exciting a variety to the monotony of the ride.

About dark we reached Frederickshall, where the train remained till morning. The doors were locked to relieve the guards from duty, and we settled down



for the night. At first sleep was sought, but we were not so sadly in need of that luxury as to enjoy it in our cramped positions. Songs, patriotic and otherwise, were sung and repeated till the guards were disgusted—not, apparently, at the sentiments of the songs, but at the noise which kept them from sleep. Stories of field, camp, and of civil life, jokes, conundrums, etc., filled up the time until a late hour, one after another dropping off into an uneasy, restless sleep, to awake half a dozen times before morning.

Soon after daylight the chivalry of the vicinity began to flock around us, eager to turn an honest penny by the Yankee trick of trading. Dubious-looking pies, biscuit "threeé for a dollar," hoe cake, etc., were brought forth to tempt our hungry palates. Prices ruled decidedly "good for high." We had eaten nothing since the morning before, and now reaped the fruits of our trading at Gordonsville. Those who had money were generously inclined, and we all had at least a bite. This revived our spirits somewhat and started general good feeling among us. Again the jest and song went round, and again we presented the appearance of anything but what a



party of wounded prisoners would naturally be supposed to present.

But it was not all smiles and laughter. Tears and groans mingled to a fearful extent. It was a strange sight—those forty-three soldiers, all more or less wounded, many of them seriously, strewed around the car in attempts at comfortable positions, laughing, joking, singing, and endeavoring to keep jolly with a spirit that would honor Mark Tapley, and sad, indeed, to hear some poor fellow's laugh end with a groan and see the change of his features as a thoughtless change of position in the enjoyment of the laugh wrenched the stiffened wound and sent a twinge of pain through his whole body, and then again to a smile as the pain left and the remembrance of the joke or the thought of his own rapid change of emotions came over him. All in all, though, the proverbial good spirits of the soldier under all circumstances were fully sustained.

After waiting there till we began to fear we should not get to Richmond in time to be sent North by the next flag of truce boat, we started. Were prisoners, before or since, during the war, anxious to get to



Richmond? At different places along the route we had opportunities to purchase provisions of various kinds, which, in view of what might be our portion in Richmond, we availed ourselves of. Richmond papers, also, were procured, in which we found all the particulars of the Brandy Station fight, and learned the extent of the engagement and that they fairly acknowledged a defeat. This was rare satisfaction. We could well afford to suffer what we had suffered, and perhaps what we had in prospect, to wring from the Southern press the unwilling admission that the Yankee cavalry could fight, and to read in their papers that Yankee schoolmasters and shoemakers, awkwardly astride of horses and holding on to the pommels of the saddles, had out-generalled, out-ridden and out-fought their own graceful cavaliers, horsemen from birth, almost; and that their own Virginians had allowed the strangers from the North to become better acquainted with the country, its roads, creeks and rivers, than they were themselves, and to surprise and ride down a superior force of them at their own homesteads. Their chagrin was unbounded, and poor General J. E. B.



Stuart had to bear the brunt of their ill-feeling. One paper even suggested his removal from command of the cavalry for allowing an occurrence so mortifying to Southern pride. If ever we had the right to enjoy reading anything it was that, and we did enjoy it. It was just grand. And more as this was among the first real cavalry fights of the war on a large scale. From that date the Southern cavalry never regained or claimed the proud position it had so long been supposed to occupy, and our cavalry, a branch of the service which previous to that time had been simply an object of expense and distrust to the government, of contempt to the South, and even of shame to ourselves, under the organization commenced by and originating with our own Burnside and completed by Joe Hooker, had vindicated its right to a position second to no other branch of the service and to that of no other country; and that position it maintained to the end of the war.

Before noon we arrived at Richmond, the goal for which we had started when we left our homes, though under different auspices than we had hoped. There was no public reception awaiting our little band.



The depot had a lonesome look, and imparted that feeling to us. A few straggling exempts looked at us for a moment and turned lazily away, and one or two newsboys cried the news at us in sickly tones, but were not allowed to sell us papers. A portion of our party was put into ambulances, and as we followed them quietly and solemnly through the almost deserted streets, with a funeral aspect, the lonesome feeling grew deeper at every step. After a not long march we halted before a large building, and on looking up observed a sign extending over the street, bearing the words, "S. Libby & Son, Ship Chandlers and Grocers." This, then, was "Libby Prison," and we eyed the edifice with a sad, heart-sinking curiosity, even though we had been told the prospect was for only a short stay, for we knew not what might happen. The ambulances moved away, (for we were given our choice to go into the prison or into the hospital, and those not seriously wounded chose the prison, fearing if they went to the hospital they would not so soon be sent North,) and we were marched to the sidewalk near the door of the prison office. As we did so I saw looking through the



grated windows in the front of the building several of my own comrades, captured the same time as myself, and in my joy at seeing old friends, even under such circumstances, without thinking I stepped from the ranks to speak to them, when I was greeted with : "Tobie, you better be careful and do about as they want you to ; they don't care what they do to a fellow here." This warning was from the mischievous monkey of my company, the most reckless dare-devil in civil life, whom no military discipline or service hardships had ever in the least checked the audacity or dampened the spirits of. That three days in Libby Prison should so tame him as to cause him to give such advice in such a tone, spoke louder than words. I stepped back into place quickly, with an indescribable feeling of terror, and from that time was as obedient as you please.

We were searched and everything contraband taken away from us. Money in small amounts we were allowed to keep, but large sums, five dollars and upward, of which there were but few, were taken, (for our own benefit, that it might not be stolen, we were told,) and a receipt given for it. We learned that



the flag of truce boat for our transportation North was expected to reach City Point the next day, and that it was the intention to send all in the prison to City Point in the morning to go by this boat, which was wonderfully good news. A roll and partial descriptive list was made out, and we were sworn "to fight no more against the Confederate States, and to perform no military duty whatever for the United States government, until exchanged according to the provisions of the cartel," and were required to sign the same parole.

Having thus been placed beyond the power of doing any more for Uncle Sam until exchanged, the officers were taken into separate apartments (to suffer a long and weary imprisonment, it proved — that was an occasion where enlisted men fared better than officers,) and we were escorted into the upper story of Libby's building and turned in with a half-clothed, half-starved crowd, captured at different times, most of them being Grant's men, wounded at Jackson, Mississippi, left there when the army went for Vicksburg, taken prisoners there and now partially or wholly recovered from their wounds. They had



been here but a few days, having been a month or more travelling over the Confederacy. Their clothes had been taken away, and their nakedness was covered with portions of worn-out and once thrown away rebel uniforms. We colonized in a corner of the back side of the room, near a window, and were soon surrounded by the former residents, eager to learn the news. We found Grant's men good boys—true men as they were brave soldiers, and as certain that Grant would take Vicksburg within a month as we are now certain that he did do it. They gave us a cordial welcome to their secluded retreat, and in various ways displayed a kindness of heart that could not be misunderstood. I was flattered by having one of them kindly offer me a couple of blankets to lie on if I wished, with the remark, "I wouldn't advise you to use them, they are cursed lousy."

Our first impressions of our new quarters were anything but favorable, and we most devoutly hoped we should leave them the next day. We had hardly got settled down when "Garry" proved himself master of the situation, whatever might be his nationality. He had carried a loaf of bread carelessly under



his arm which had escaped confiscation, and now proceeded to unpack his "leedle drunk," as he called it. What was our surprise to see him carefully remove a slice from one end and take from the loaf quite an amount of money, a bunch of matches—an article there had been a most rigid search for and which none of the rest, to my knowledge, had succeeded in smuggling—and various other articles of value to him and us just then. A smoke was the first thought, and thanks to his foresight, many of us had and enjoyed one. Our friends from the lower tenement paid us brief visits, one or two at a time as they could do so without detection, and we received much advice to do just as we were ordered, and were told that the day before a man had been fired at by the chivalrous home guard for striving too hard for a breath of fresh air from the window. The comrade to whom I had given my haversack on the day of the fight appeared, borrowed some matches, went back, and in due time came again with a rousing cup of coffee made from the contents of the haversack, over a fire built from portions of a barrel they had demolished on the lower floor, for doing which there



was a lively row then going on down stairs, and threats of longer confinement for the one that did it if discovered. We were advised to put the coffee out of the way as soon as possible, for fear of detection, and it just did us good.

The afternoon passed quietly in talking and sleeping and in trying to extract comfort. I amused myself somewhat by studying the dispositions of my fellow prisoners, which showed forth as plainly and in as great diversity as in camp. There were the growler and the happy-go-lucky; the looker on the worst and on the best side; the lazy and the active; the quiet and the restless; the argumentative and the take-it-for-granted; the cowed down and the free spirited; the hopeful and the despondent; the "sorry-he-enlisted," and the proud to be a prisoner, even, for country's sake. All these characteristics were plainly marked, (though all were a degree happier at the thought of so soon being released,) and it was easy to choose desirable comrades. I could not help noticing one young man from Iowa, who continually paced the floor, talking now with this and now with that comrade, his head erect and his spirit evidently



as undaunted as though he were on his native prairies. It was comforting to watch him and see how little his proud spirit could be curbed by prison walls.

We were interrupted, it seemed every five minutes, by some one with a little brief Confederate authority, with "Fall in Yanks, in four rows," when we were counted, a due share of growling and swearing done that the count was not twice alike, and warned not to "leave this yere floor; for you 'uns were paroled on this yere floor, and are counted on this yere floor, and will be sent away from this yere floor; and if you 'uns aint on this yere floor when the rest go, you 'uns can't go." This was the greatest bore of the establishment in my experience. Of the prison and its appointments I will not stop to speak, they have been so often described and are so well known to many of you.

Along towards night the rations of black bean soup were brought to us in kettles no decent New England farmer would feed his pigs from till they had been washed. Here I found the truth of the old adage, "Patient waiting no loss"; for not being quite



up to the scramble and rush of such occasions in that hotel, we new-comers did not get a dip till near the bottom of a kettle, and as a consequence secured rather more than an equitable proportion of beans, which we were well satisfied to do black as the beans were, and as we ate them we hugely enjoyed the growling of others about so few beans, and the repetitions of the old jokes of "diving for a bean," "Will somebody lend me a bean to dip in my broth once more," etc.

At the last time of counting us for the night we were again admonished to remain on "this yere floor," and were also informed that it had been thought that some of us might like a photograph of the prison to carry with us as a reminder of the happy hours passed there, and having a due regard for the wishes of the prisoners in all things, the authorities had procured some, which we could have at the rate of two dollars for the small size (two and five-eighths by two inches in size), and five dollars for the large size. We now thought we could understand why small sums of money had been left us when we entered the prison. The remains of my hat supplied



me with a copy which I still treasure, and the remains of "Garry's" uniform brought into the prison in his "leedle drunk," supplied himself and others. This looked to us a little like Yankeeism, but of course such a thought was gross injustice to the high-toned Southerners.

At dark, or thereabouts, we lay down for sleep. With the stone window stool for a pillow I was soon as sweetly sleeping as a child, and at two o'clock next morning was awakened from as pleasant dreams of home as soldier ever enjoyed, to "go North." At first I was half inclined to growl at being disturbed, even for so desirable a purpose, but I soon got over that, and in a few minutes we were in line and slowly marching down stairs. At the outside door of the prison were barrels of very stale bread in junks, one junk of which was given to each of us. We were drawn up in the inevitable "four rows" in the street in front of the prison, and an hour or more wasted in trying to count us, during which the counter displayed a large amount of bad temper, and we displayed unequalled patience though it began to grow thin along towards the last. An end to this finally



came and we started for the cars. How long that march through the rebel capital in the early morning was, I seem to have no recollection, but in the course of time we found ourselves closely packed into box and cattle cars, where the sick and wounded had already been put, and in motion.

At Petersburg we marched through the city without getting much of an idea of it, though I remember noticing that there were more signs of life than at Richmond. Peddlers of cakes, pies, bread, and like temptations were as plenty as in Washington, and in equal variety. After getting into prison, "Garry" discovered that the pair of pants he got in his last trade were badly infected with vermin. This was too much for him, and he at once got out of them, but with an eye for contingencies he took them with him, and seeing a cake shop on the route through this city he darted in and quickly came back with thirty ginger cakes in place of the pants. The peddlers followed us to the cars and hung around us for the hour or more we waited there, while blankets and different articles of clothing furnished many a poor fellow with a toothsome bit. Confederate soldiers,



also, were there in quite a number, and, as ever, ready for an argument, and as confident in the right of their cause and its ultimate success as could be wished. Grant and the prospect of his taking Vicksburg were the topics of discussion between them and Grant's men, and right loyally did the latter affirm that their hero would take it if he had not done so already, while their opponents as stoutly affirmed that he would not and could not. The probable result of the struggle, the right and wrong of either side, the capability of the North to flourish without the South, and *vice versa*, the resources of both sections, etc., were treated in a liberal manner, not free from brag on either side and perhaps without great disparity in argument, though the fact was patent that the Confederates (as well as our own soldiers) doing duty in cities and towns were not so well posted on the merits of the opposing armies as were their brethren at the front.

Off at last, and all were happy in the thought that this was the last ride under rebel guardianship. For a time the ride was enlivened with the usual singing, joking, etc., but as we drew near the end of the



route the party subsided into comparative quiet, each one apparently busy with his own thoughts. I often thought of this ride a year or more later, while riding over this same road, then doing noble and extensive duty in transporting munitions of war to the glorious old Army of the Potomac. All at once, and almost before we expected it, we rounded the turn at City Point, and came in full view of James River. All eyes were eagerly looking for the flag of truce boat, and in a moment more it came in sight. First we saw the flag of truce, and then, proudly floating a welcome to its returning defenders, the dear old, grand old, stars and stripes. Then arose one long, loud cheer such as is seldom heard, followed by a scene that beggars description. The sight of that good old flag so unexpectedly, sent a thrill through the heart of every one of us. Men whose lips the name of the Deity had not passed for years, save in a curse, now devoutly thanked God for the privilege of looking on "Old Glory" once more. Men who had faced death fearlessly, had seen comrades shot down by their sides with but a curse for the traitorous hand that directed the bullet,



had suffered hardships of every kind without a murmur, and out of whom the pains of gangrened wounds and of amputation had wrung hardly a groan, now cried like children as they gazed upon the old, familiar starry banner. Grant's men and those of the party who had been under rebel jurisdiction for some time, were perfectly frantic with joy, while to us who had not been from beneath its folds a week, it had new beauty and was the most welcome sight we ever saw, before or since. We had often read of the protection of the United States flag and thought we understood what it meant, but now we realized it as never before, and not a man in the party but breathed to Heaven a "long may it wave" from the inmost recesses of his heart, and registered anew the vow to defend it and maintain its honor, even with his life.

As the train stopped, and almost before, those who were able tumbled from the cars in joyful haste, most of them going for the water like ducks, and playing and splashing in it like so many school boys. Freedom of action and the luxury of the bath—the first good square wash for days and weeks—were



combined in a most agreeable degree. In the meantime the exchange officers of both governments were attending to red-tape requirements. These satisfactorily settled, the sick and wounded were first taken on board the boat, and we followed, passing one at a time between two officers, one in blue and one in grey, and being counted by both like so many sheep. "Ninety-three!" sang out the officer in grey as George stepped on the gang-plank; "ninety-three!" responded the officer in blue; "ninety-three, yer slob!" responded George, with a defiant look at grey-coat as he passed by. "Ninety-four!" as I followed, and so on. On the boat the invalids were tenderly nursed by the gentle hands of noble women, while each of us received liberal slices of soft bread and cold boiled ham, and a bountiful cup of coffee with milk in it, making for us the very best meal we ever tasted. George and myself went upon the saloon deck and took position where we could watch proceedings. The remainder came on board slowly, now and then a dispute about the count causing a halt in the column, and many were the tokens of joy as they stepped from captivity to freedom, some of



which were anything but complimentary in manner or words to the rebel officer who was keeping tally, and who for the time being represented the whole Southern Confederacy.

While standing there I witnessed an incident very common during the civil war. A rebel officer who stood on the shore discovered on the boat a soldier from his old home in Illinois. He made himself known, and many and rapid were his inquiries after his old friends, interspersed with now and then a "Do they know where I am?" I fancied with a half-ashamed look. He expressed his regret at not having known that his old townsman was a prisoner, saying he could and would have made him more comfortable, and closed the scene with: "Well, remember me to all the folks, please, and if you get taken again just inquire for me; I'll treat you well if you fall into my hands, but if I meet you on the field I'll kill you if I can."

At last all were counted and all on board, the necessary papers were passed, the boat slowly moved away, and we were on the way to the North and freedom, leaving behind us a lonesome-looking squad



of occupation-gone rebels, in a dismal-appearing corner of country, and the white-livered looking Confederate flag flying from a little house on the bluff. Of the sail down the river it is enough to say that a sail down the same river, from the same point, two years later, on the way home, with the war ended, had not half the whole-souled enjoyment in it.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 7.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.



# INCIDENTS OF CAVALRY SERVICE

IN

## LOUISIANA.

BY

CHARLES H. PARKHURST,

(Late Lieutenant-Colonel Third Rhode Island Cavalry.)



PROVIDENCE:

SIDNEY S. RIDER.

1879.



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1879.



INCIDENTS OF CAVALRY SERVICE  
IN  
LOUISIANA.

*[Read before the Society June 14th, 1876.]*

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IN the early part of the war nearly every infantry officer of the line, and certainly every soldier, was fully convinced that the most comfortable and advantageous method of fighting the rebels was on horseback. As the result of this conviction many of the nine-months officers and men, especially of the Eleventh Rhode Island, who had tasted the delights of the famous march of one hundred and twenty-five miles in five days, from Suffolk to the Blackwater, under General Corcoran, were eager to join the Third Rhode Island Cavalry, which Colonel Willard Sayles was actively recruiting in the summer and fall of 1863.

It was thought to be a piece of great good fortune that this regiment was to be assigned to the Depart-



ment of the Gulf, and was to be under the command of General Nathaniel P. Banks, whose military star was then in the ascendant. The regiment was sent to New Orleans in detachments, the first battalion under Major George R. Davis leaving in December, 1863, another detachment following in March, and a third, with Colonel Sayles, still later.

Only the first battalion and two companies of the Second Cavalry (which had been united with the Third) took part in that disastrous campaign known as the Second Red River Expedition.

This is neither the time nor the place to criticize the military career of General Banks. His record has passed into history. One thing, however, can be justly said of him, and that is, that he never attempted to relieve himself from the responsibility of the failure of this expedition. There has been much discussion in Congress, and there was much of what might be called free-rifted talk in the army concerning the objects of this campaign. Some have claimed that its object was wholly political, some that it was wholly for stealing cotton and sugar, and some at the time, for a quite brief period, actually thought



that it was for the purpose of conquering the rebels. Most of us were quite easily disabused of the latter theory.

General Banks's instructions from Washington were dated November 9, 1862, and contemplated, first, the reduction of Vicksburg and the opening of the Mississippi River. General Halleck uses this language: "The President regards the opening of the Mississippi River as the first and most important of all our military and naval operations, and it is hoped that you will not lose a moment in accomplishing it." Then it was suggested, after the capture of Vicksburg, to destroy the railroads at Jackson and Marion. This was done by Grant's and Sherman's armies. Then (I quote from General Halleck's instructions) "to ascend with a naval and military force the Red River as far as it is navigable, and thus open an outlet for the sugar and cotton of northern Louisiana." It is also suggested that having the Red River in our possession it would form the best base for operations in Texas.

These instructions from Washington are sufficient to show that whatever else may be charged against



General Banks, he certainly was not the originator of the expedition.

After the army and navy reached Alexandria and had moved towards Shreveport, some three hundred and fifty miles distant, and the head of the river navigation, known to be the great cotton depot for the surrounding country of Texas and Louisiana, every one felt that cotton was the great object of the expedition, as it was perfectly well known that if Shreveport was captured it could not be held except by a large force, and that it was not of sufficient importance to hold. It was nearly five hundred miles from the Mississippi River, and must be reinforced and supplied from the river, making necessary a constant and active patrol of the Red River by gunboats. Besides, the river itself was, if possible, more treacherous than the people who dwelt upon its banks, and was persistently low when Admiral Porter and his gunboat fleet most desired it "to be booming," to use his language. For some strange reason it wouldn't boom at all.

General Banks with his well-appointed army, all veterans, attempted to capture Shreveport. He



hoped to have made a union with General Steele, whose forces were supposed to be moving from Little Rock, Arkansas. The enemy's force was concentrated. General Banks and General Steele were moving towards each other at right angles, and never met, and never practically heard from each other or in any way co-operated. A large portion of General Banks's army, some ten thousand, under the command of General A. J. Smith, were practically and entirely an independent command. They were "loaned" to General Banks by General Grant, for thirty days. General Smith did not report to General Banks, and was, except nominally, quite without his command. His forces were splendid specimens of the Western soldiers, always ready for a fight, and no discredit can be cast upon them or their brave commander. But this anomalous condition of things, this having an independent command inside of the army of General Banks, was annoying to him and prejudicial to the successful management of the expedition. General Smith was, I am quite sure, a regular army officer. General Banks was looked upon by him as a political general who knew but lit-



tle of the business of a fighting campaign, and General Smith made no bones of expressing himself with great freedom about his nominal commander. It is also to be remembered that General Banks was expected to accomplish certain political results in setting up a State government in Louisiana, and as the result elections were held while the army halted. So that the short way to set forth the second Red River campaign would be to call it a "political-military-cotton-seeking expedition," and not much military either.

The army and the navy moved toward Shreveport but failed to see the promised land, and after the battle at Sabine Cross Roads, where, to use the expressive language of some of the soldiers, they skirmished with a baggage train of some three hundred and fifty wagons separating the cavalry from the infantry supports, this grand army changed its direction and concluded to return to Alexandria. The Confederates were again unaccommodating. They resisted General Banks's approach to Shreveport, and they resisted persistently his efforts to return to Alexandria. They continued their want of accom-



modation the entire distance. The treacherous river seemed imbued with the same spirit, and though Admiral Porter said his flat-bottomed gunboats could run anywhere where there was a heavy dew, still they would run aground in Red River. But at last the expedition, after some severe fighting, reached Alexandria.

Just above the town the river runs over a rocky bed where the water is quite shallow, and Porter's gunboats could not pass this point on account of the low water. One of the gunboats had been grounded and destroyed some distance above. Colonel Bailey, the Acting Engineer of the Nineteenth Army Corps, proposed to get the gunboat afloat by constructing wing dams, and so to raise the water to a sufficient height to float the boat over the bars. His offer was declined, as the navy at that time neither desired or regarded counsel from landsmen, and as the result of this stupid jealousy the gunboat had to be destroyed to prevent her falling into the hands of the enemy. In a dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy, a few days before, Admiral Porter said: "If nature does not change her laws there will be no doubt a



rise of water." But nature for some reason declined to accommodate the Admiral, and the experience of a western lumberman was required to save the entire gunboat fleet.

After the army had reached Alexandria it was compelled to remain as the guardians of Porter's fleet of gunboats. The great object of the campaign had failed of success; Shreveport with its stores of cotton was still in the enemy's hands; the army was dispirited at the failure, and grumbled, criticised and swore as only beaten soldiers can.

Colonel Bailey was confident that by the construction of dams, the water above the town could be raised to a sufficient height to float the fleet over the rapids. The Admiral, it was generally understood, had no faith in Colonel Bailey's damming the river, though if common rumor is to be credited, the Admiral and most of his men were heartily in favor of and actually did exercise themselves continually in damming the Red River and all connected therewith. General Banks, however, if the statements of those who ought to know are entitled to any credit, had from the first an abiding faith in the success of Col-



onel Bailey's scheme and showed his faith by his works. On Sunday, the first day of May, the work was commenced. Colonel Bailey had full authority to detail as many men from the army as he desired, and nearly the whole of the infantry were employed at different times in the construction of the dam, and in eight days this vast work was finished.

The river at this point was about eight hundred feet in width and the labor was commenced by running from the left bank what was called a "tree dam," made of trees and brush cross-tied with heavy timber, filled in with brick and stone, and otherwise strengthened in nearly every conceivable way. This "tree dam" extended about three hundred feet into the river, and large coal barges filled with brick and stone were sunk at the end. From the right bank of the river cribs loaded with brick and stone composed the dam on that side. At this time the water on the rapids was not more than four and a half or five feet in depth, and the current was said to be some ten miles an hour. The result of the building of the dam was to raise the water above to a sufficient height so that, on the afternoon of the eighth of May, five



vessels passed the rapids and lay at anchor just above the dam. Great fears were, however, entertained that the immense pressure of water upon the dam from the piling of water above it, would cause it to give way, and the Admiral was constantly urged to get his vessels in readiness to make the passage, which was conceded to be their only hope of safety. This, however, was not done. Neither advice or suggestions from the land forces were favorably received by those in charge of the fleet. The next morning part of the dam was carried away, and four of the gunboats passed through the opening thus made and reached a place of safety. Nearly the whole army were watching the experiment with great anxiety, and when the first gunboat, the Lexington, made the passage successfully, one loud shout of joy went up from the thousands of soldiers gathered upon the banks, and for the time all jealousies and heart-burnings were forgotten and all united in awarding all praise to the hero of the hour, Colonel Bailey. It was well known to the officers of the army, that the naval forces had openly stated that it was the intention of General Banks to leave the fleet



to take care of itself, but I do not believe that the idea was ever entertained for a moment by General Banks, and his published dispatches to Admiral Porter and his conduct from the day of his return to Alexandria until the fleet was safe, furnish the best answer to that unfounded scandal.

There was not from the beginning to the end of the campaign, that kindly feeling existing between the army and navy which should have been found, and I have always felt that cotton or the desire to own other people's cotton, which has caused so much misery to the country, had much to do with many of the untoward results of this campaign; and it is quite certain that every soldier who took part in that campaign will endorse the statement of General Banks, that Admiral Porter's published official statements relative to the Red River campaign are at variance with the truth (of which there are many thousand living witnesses), and do foul injustice to the officers and soldiers of the army, living and dead, to whom the navy is wholly indebted for the preservation of its gunboat fleet.

The fleet was saved and the orders were given to



return to New Orleans. It was the fortune of the Third Rhode Island Cavalry to be on outpost duty for the three days prior to the evacuation of Alexandria, and when we withdrew our outposts and fell back upon the town on the evening of the third day, we found what we had left as a flourishing town nothing but ashes. The whole country was dry and parched. Every thing about the town was like tinder, and the story which was generally believed was, that the fire was caused by a soldier, who had become enraged at the exactions of some of the post traders in the town, discharging his pistol into a heap of combustible material in the store, thus igniting it, and in a few hours hardly a building was left in the compact part of the town.

The Fifth Cavalry Brigade had the post of rear guard for the retreating army, and though the post of honor was given to the Third Cavalry, there were many officers and men who after three days and nights in the saddle, would not have grievously mourned had they been permitted to share for a little time this post of honor with some other regiment.

An army on the retreat is never especially happy,



no matter how brilliantly the retreat is conducted. Falling back is not enlivening, and an army thus circumstanced is not inclined to take much stock in the reports of great successes elsewhere, unless they are wonderfully well authenticated. An instance of this happened at Marksville, or Mansura, as it is sometimes called. Two days after we left Alexandria we met the enemy, in quite strong force, disposed to make a stand. Our forces were drawn up in line of battle at early dawn, and stretched over the magnificent plain. Just before going into the fight, word was brought to the regimental officers from General Banks, that he had received news by special messenger from General Grant of the capture of Richmond. Such news would naturally have aroused some enthusiasm, even among troops dispirited by defeat, but as the word was passed down the lines by the respective regimental commanders, not a murmur of applause was heard, and one irreverent private said: "You can't smooth out this retreat by any such nonsense as that; we heard the same story at Port Hudson and it's no truer now than it was then."

After a few hours of lively fighting, resulting in



quite severe loss to the enemy, we started for Simsport on the Atchafalaya, where Colonel Bailey again showed his engineering skill in the construction of a pontoon bridge of steamboats. The river or bayou here is some six hundred yards in width. The bridge was certainly of novel construction. Western steamboats, as is known, differ materially from an eastern craft in the style of construction. The bow of the western boat is practically on the level of the lower deck and is open. Colonel Bailey collected a sufficient number of the transports that were at Simsport and arranged them side by side the whole width of the river or bayou, and then built his bridge by simply laying plank across the bows of the boats as they lay there, and thus the entire army of General Banks passed over, no longer to be his army, but now to belong to the Division of the Mississippi, under the command of General E. R. S. Canby.

For the remainder of the term of service of the regiment their duties were only quasi military, as the condition of affairs in Louisiana was only quasi civil, if indeed it has ever been more than quasi civil. The forces remaining in Louisiana were practically



an armed force occupying the territory and trying to support and maintain the system of civil or quasi civil government which General Banks had endeavored to establish in the early part of 1864. Our chief duties were hunting guerrillas and jayhawkers (as there was no considerable armed force on or near the Mississippi), and in protecting the Northern men who had leased the abandoned plantations and who were trying to make their fortunes in using the labor of the freedmen. This was a costly and sad experience for most of them, for they either had to employ some old resident called a Union man, who had been in neither army—a stay-at-home who had the vices of both armies and the virtues of neither—or else to rely upon their own judgment, and whichever conclusion was adopted was quite sure to result in financial ruin.

General Thomas W. Sherman, who had lost a leg at Port Hudson, was in command in that part of Louisiana embracing New Orleans and certain posts on either side of the Mississippi River. His staff was at times quite largely composed of young men who had secured that great object of a second lieu-



tenant's ambition, a position as aid on a brigadier-general's staff. The presumption of some of these young men was only excelled by their ignorance. Insulting messages were often received in the name of General Sherman, from these young sprouts, by general officers who had forgotten more than these aids to the General ever thought of knowing. The result was that while everybody respected and honored General Sherman, he was never a favorite as a commanding officer.

The writer remembers very well an instance of the character of the dispatches that sometimes came from his headquarters. While stationed at a post called "The Hermitage," on the east bank of the Mississippi, opposite Donaldsonville, word came to me early one morning from a good friend to our cause, that the telegraphic line on the east side of the river had been cut about a mile below my farthest outpost, by the crew of a boat which had landed from a steamer that had come down the river just before daylight. It was well known that the Confederates had in the Red River an exceedingly fast and powerful ram or gunboat, known as the "Webb." This



boat formerly belonged in New York, and the strictest instructions had been given to the gunboat fleet on the Mississippi to keep a constant watch lest she should get out of the Red River. There were iron-clads at the mouth of the Red River, Port Hudson, Baton Rouge, and at Donaldsonville. The line of wires on the east bank extended from Plaquemine to New Orleans. There was also a telegraph line on the west bank of the river, extending from Donaldsonville down Bayou Lafourche to the railroad at Thibodeaux and thence to New Orleans. My informant was fully satisfied that the steamer that had passed down and whose boat's crew had cut the wires, was the Confederate ram Webb. I at once sent a messenger across the river to Colonel Fiske, commanding at Donaldsonville, and requested him to send the information by his telegraphic line to General Sherman. Colonel Fiske telegraphed, "Colonel Parkhurst reports that the rebel ram Webb has passed Donaldsonville, cutting the wires on the east bank." The reply Colonel Fiske received was: "Tell Colonel Parkhurst, we think here his rebel ram is a sheep. By order of General Sherman." The ram reached New



Orleans unmolested, passing the city at full speed, and when a short distance below the Custom House displayed the Confederate flag and commenced firing. Every one then knew the difference between the rebel ram and the sheep for whose origin I was to be responsible. It was generally understood after this telegram, that sheep was not a favorite subject of discussion at General Sherman's headquarters.

I had also sent word to the Captain of the gunboat at Donaldsonville, of what I had learned, and he, having his boat always under steam, started at once for New Orleans and arrived just in season to witness the destruction of the ram by a broadside from the man-of-war Richmond, which happened to be coming up the river, and recognizing the Confederate vessel flying the stars and bars had driven her ashore, whence her crew escaped into the swamps. Had it not been for the timely appearance of the Richmond, the Webb would easily have passed Forts Jackson and St. Philip and have gone out to sea. She was prepared in the most effective manner as a cruiser, and then my poor sheep would have assumed a more formidable character.



It was somewhat amusing to witness the intense mortification of the gunboat officers. Captain Fitzhugh's executive officer was on deck and saw the Webb steam by Donaldsonville. Her description was as well known to all the naval officers as that of their own vessels. Their special duty was to be on the watch for this very boat, and yet, though there was no other vessel answering her description in the river or any of its tributaries, in the hands of the Confederates, and though they knew that she was only waiting a favorable opportunity to elude their vigilance and make her way to the gulf, they permitted her to pass in plain sight without their knowledge, and received notice of her escape from the soldiers whose eyes (in their opinion) would have been better employed in attending to their duties on the land. I have never seen in any of the reports from the commanding officers of either the army or navy, any report of this affair except the report of the fact of the destruction of the Webb by the Richmond, and I have stated the facts as they came under my own observation.

It was not my fortune to visit General Sherman's



headquarters but once and I never personally received anything but the most courteous treatment from him, but the files of his department will show that there was at times some rather spicy telegraphing between the posts on the river and some of his staff officers. One of the great troubles of staff officers during the war was, that many of them assumed knowledge whether they had it or not, and many of the orders that were issued in the name of commanding officers were necessarily issued by staff officers without the knowledge of their chiefs, and much mischief was thereby produced. Of course General Sherman never personally authorized the, at the time, somewhat famous sheep dispatch, and probably may never have known of it, but he was blamed, after the results were known, for allowing such a dispatch to go from his headquarters.

As a Rhode Islander, I have always felt that General Sherman's abilities as a military man were not properly recognized during the war. He had no political wires to pull and no politicians were enlisted in his service or were welcome at his headquarters. He was every inch a soldier. He was faithful to



every duty. He always obeyed and always insisted on obedience. He was not easily convinced of error and was not gracious to criticism, especially from subordinates whom he had perhaps unjustly criticised, and when the attempt was made there was generally more strong Saxon than polite French in the General's language.

I have thus in a plain way noticed some incidents of cavalry service in the Department of the Gulf, and I shall be more than satisfied if by their recital I may have stimulated some more graceful pen to record the incidents of other campaigns where more stirring events occurred. Many of the most interesting personal sketches necessarily do not appear in any published records, and if this Society can continue to receive from its members and others from time to time, their personal observations, much really valuable historical material will thereby be obtained.



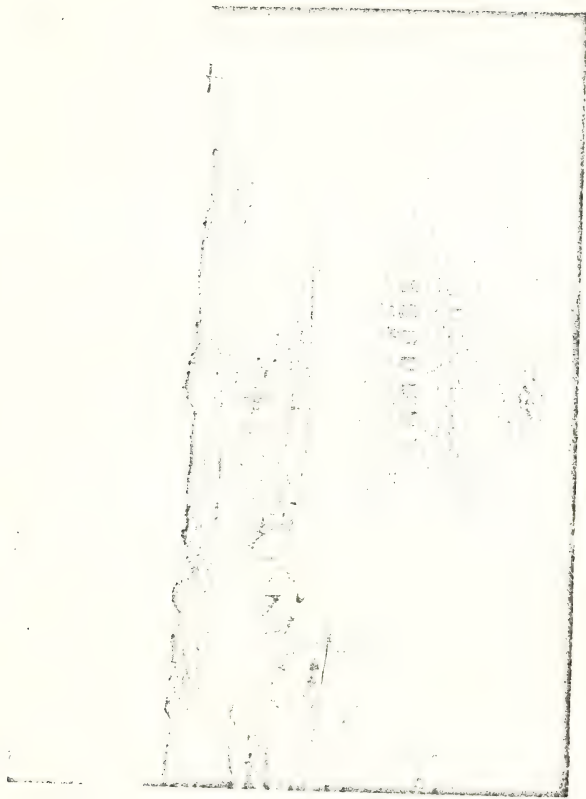
PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 8.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.





## FORT MORGAN, CITADEL.

FROM THE SOUTH SIDE.

The vessel to the right is the Lackawanna—her position during second and third days bombardment and at the surrender.



# THE BAY FIGHT

A SKETCH OF THE

## BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY

AUGUST 5TH, 1864.

By WILLIAM F. HUTCHINSON, M. D.,

(Late Acting Passed Assistant Surgeon, United States Navy.)



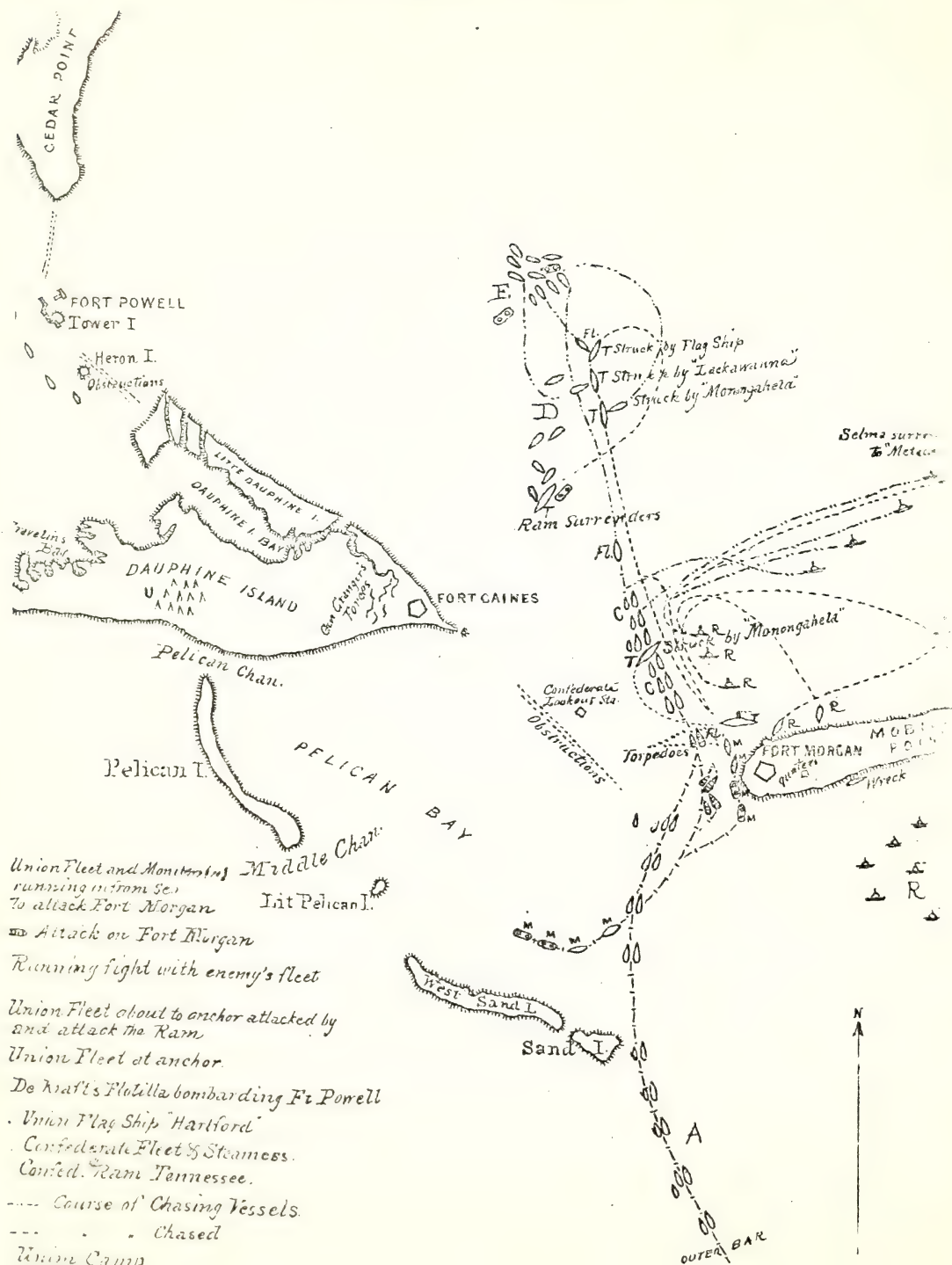
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1879.



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Union Fleet and Monitor *Middle*  
running in from Sea  
To attack Fort Morgan Int Pelican I.

### Attack on Fort Morgan

Running fight with enemy's fleet

Union Fleet about to anchor attacked by  
and attack the Rm.

Union Fleet at anchor.

De laff's Flotilla bombarding Ft Powell

Union Flag Ship "Hartford"

Confederate Fleet & Steamers.

Confed. Ram Tennessee.

---- Course of Chasing Vessels.

--- " Chased

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THE BAY FIGHT  
OR THE  
BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY.

[Read before the Society, October 4th, 1876.]

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ONE by one the more northern strongholds of the rebel seacoast had fallen before the combined attacks of our gallant army and navy, and at last all was in readiness to deal a blow on the Gulf coast which should blot out the most important station remaining in the possession of the rebel government. For three years, Mobile Bay, with its many channels of entrance, its various and continually changing bars, and its powerful defences, had been a point whence much successful blockade running had been carried on, and wherein had been fitted out two of the boldest and most unscrupulous of the piratical rovers dignified by the name of Confederate men-of-war.

Within its protecting forts lay the only remaining



fleet of the enemy, commanded by Admiral Buchanan (F.), in his flag ship, the ram Tennessee. Between this officer and his ship existed strong points of resemblance. He, the last and only Confederate Admiral afloat—a stern, pitiless man, deaf to all considerations save those of mistaken duty to a bad cause, brave as a lion and a superb officer; it—their strongest, costliest and last ironclad, their boast and pride—they were indeed fitted to go down together.

It had become necessary to break up this nest of treason, for the blockade runners, barred from their whilom ports by the victorious progress of our arms, came here in great numbers, laden with vast quantities of munitions of war and provisions; and, notwithstanding the most painstaking vigilance on the part of the fleet, few dark nights and no single stormy one passed without one or more of these "carrier doves," as the Southern dames called them, finding their way into the beleaguered harbor.

This reason determined Admiral Farragut (D. G.) to hasten the attack which he had long held in contemplation, and a call was made upon General Canby (E. R. S.) for a military force sufficient to



co-operate with the navy and hold the forts when captured. To this duty was assigned Major General Gordon Granger, with a sufficient force of artillery and infantry.

The morning of August 4th, 1864, dawned beautifully clear, and the blue waters of the Mexican Gulf stretched away southward a thousand miles to the Venezuelan shore, while to the north its waves plashed lazily in a tropical sun against the white sand of Dauphin Island and Mobile Point, between which curved the winding channel of entrance to the bay. Twenty-six stately ships of war lay at anchor on the bar six miles from land, their long pennants and colors clinging to the spars, while from one to the other flashed small boats with their crews of blue jackets, and with gold-laced officers in the stern sheets, from whose uniforms the sunbeams glinted merrily. Instead of being away on their stations, deployed in such a manner as to draw a cordon of guard around the harbor entrance, the ships were massed around one central vessel, from whose lofty mizzen truck floated the broad blue pennant of the noblest sailor of them all, Rear Admiral Farragut, our glorious and beloved chieftain.



It was evident that something was brewing, and when, an hour later, the signal displayed from the Hartford read, "Commanding officers repair on board flagship"—all hands were on the alert, knowing the signal meant a war council. And when, a little later, the great monitor Tecumseh came steaming slowly up from the eastward, direct from New York, and anchored near the other ironclads, which had arrived the night before, we knew that the decisive moment, the moment for which we had been waiting so eagerly and long, was at hand. About noon the captain of the Lackawanna, John B. Marchand, with which vessel I was then serving as assistant surgeon, returned, and one glance at his stern old face told us of coming strife. As he passed aft, he beckoned the executive officer, Lieutenant Spencer (Thomas S.), and, after a moment's conversation, the latter came forward, his face all aglow with excitement as he said, "Tomorrow at daylight, fellows, hurrah!"

We had known for two weeks which ships were to participate, as they had been away to Pensacola navy yard, two at a time, for the purpose of stripping off all the spars and rigging which might inter-



fere with their efficiency in action, and to have their sides covered, opposite the boilers and machinery, with a double casing of heavy chain cable, so as in some measure to ironclad them over their weakly-protected vitals.

Considerable delay had already been experienced in awaiting the arrival of the heavy monitors, without whose aid it was deemed unwise to attack the formidable ram Tennessee, of whose strength we only knew that the rebel engineers called her the most powerful ever built, and no one had yet forgotten the Atlanta or the Merrimac. Admiral Farragut would have attacked without them, had they delayed another day, and the result of the action proved the correctness of his often-repeated assertion, "that the same officers and men taken from an iron clad and put on board of a wooden ship, would give a better account of themselves, and have a better chance in the latter than in the former," or as he sometimes put it, "Give me hearts of iron in ships of oak."

At noon on the fourth of August, the order of battle was sent on board the ships which were to



participate, and the line formed as shown in the diagram, viz.: the Brooklyn and Octorara, the Hartford and Metacomet, the Richmond and Port Royal, the Lackawanna and Seminole, the Monongahela and Kennebec, the Ossipee and Itasca, the Oneida and Galena—and the four monitors—Tecumseh, Manhattan, Winnebago and Chickasaw. The order read :

“FLAG-SHIP HARTFORD, }  
OFF MOBILE BAY, August 4th, 1864. }

The above diagram will be observed to-morrow morning, or when the fleet goes in.

D. G. FARRAGUT, *Rear Admiral.*”

Then we knew that before twenty-four hours passed, we should either be inside Mobile Bay, conquerors of the stronghold and captors of the rebel fleet, or be ourselves quietly at rest beneath its muddy waters. Yet one would have thought the busy preparation on every hand for some fête—some pleasure sail, so gay were officers and men. Many had left their valuables ashore at Pensacola to be forwarded to relatives in case of disaster—and now it only remained to while away the few remaining hours as



best we might. Scores of officers from the left-out ships came aboard to negotiate exchanges with some of the lucky ones, but not one man could be found who would trade and stay out. All were certain of success under our beloved chieftain, although we knew there was hot work ahead; for, as you will see by the diagram, we were to pass and did pass within eight hundred yards of Fort Morgan and its powerful water batteries upon which the rebel engineers placed their main dependence, and which, we had been informed, mounted more than one hundred heavy guns. Yet we clinked glasses merrily with our stay-behind comrades, and they bade us good night with envious faces, cursing their luck—each one wishing that something might happen to one of the attacking fleet, so that his own ship could have a chance in the fray.

Morning came at last, after so busy a night that only an hour could be given to sleep. At eight bells, or four o'clock, all hands were turned out, and our consort, the Seminole, steamed alongside and was made fast to us on the port side. The vessels were double-banked in this manner, in order that



the farthest from the fort and protected from its fire might carry the other through, should she either be disabled by shot or have her propeller entangled in any of the numerous floating ropes with which the rebels had filled the channel, for that express purpose. The morning was beautifully clear, and the battlements of Forts Morgan and Gaines, with the few gaunt pines on Mobile Point, stood out in clear relief against the blazing eastern sky, all giving promise of a fine day. Later, as is usually the result of heavy cannonading, clouds came up, and a slight shower occurred during the latter part of the action.

The Brooklyn, with the Octorara, steamed into position at the head of the line, and the other vessels fell in as soon as possible, at intervals of fifty yards. The flagship did not lead, because the Brooklyn was fitted with an ingenious contrivance to catch torpedoes, called a devil, composed of a number of long iron hooks attached to a spar, which was slung from the bow-sprit and sunk even with the ship's keel, and for the further reason that her commander, Captain Alden (James), knew the channel thoroughly, as he



had been chief of the coast survey in ante-bellum days, and author of the official charts of the harbor.

At twenty minutes to six the line was formed, and we commenced to steam in slowly, the Admiral's order being to carry the lowest possible pressure, so as to avoid as much as possible the fearful scalding effect of the steam, should the boilers be pierced. The ships were dressed from stem to stern in flags, as if for a gala day, and every man sprang to his station with a will when the long roll called all hands to general quarters, which was sounded the moment we were fairly under way.

As the Brooklyn came within range of the fort, the rebels opened the dance with a single gun, a three hundred pounder Armstrong, at precisely seven o'clock. It is a curious sight to watch a single shot from so heavy a piece of ordnance. First, you see the puff of white smoke upon the distant ramparts and then you see the shot coming, looking exactly as if some gigantic hand had thrown in play a ball toward you. By the time it is half way, you get the boom of the report, and then the howl of the missile, which apparently grows so rapidly in size



that every green hand on board who can see it, is certain that it will hit him between the eyes. Then, as it goes past with a shriek like a thousand devils, the inclination to do reverence is so strong that it is almost impossible to resist it. On board the Lackawanna we had several youngsters just from the Academy, and it was amusing to see how the nerves which were as steel an hour later, gave way at first. Leaving their respective stations as the great shot drew near, they ran, fore and aft, bump against one another in their efforts to get out of the way. The laughter of the older officers speedily recalled them to their senses, and they made good time back to their guns, which were none the less bravely fought for the momentary weakness. For half an hour, as we steamed up into range, the fleet took the entire rebel fire without returning a gun, and the minutes seemed like hours. But at last the signal came, "Commence firing," the cannonade grew furious, and the scene became terribly exciting and fascinating. It is difficult to explain to those who have never taken part in any closely contested battle, the complete loss of personal fear which occurs



as soon as work fairly begins. Comrades are falling in every direction around you, yet no thought of danger enters one's brain and the only impulse is to kill as many of the enemy as possible—men are transformed into tigers.

The battle was a fair one, ships against brick walls and earth works, each side doing its level best. As the fleet came into action, however, the broadsides came too fast and heavy for any mortal beings to stand, and the rebel soldiers fled from the parapet in dismay. Shell, grape and canister from the great cannon went hissing through the air, until it seemed as if hell itself had broken loose, and smoke was so dense on the decks and water that both fort and vessels were completely hidden and we both fired at the flashes of the guns alone.

Admiral Farragut, finding it impossible to see his ships from the deck so as to direct their movements, ascended the main rigging nearly to the top, whence he had a clear view, being above the smoke which lay so thick below. Captain Drayton (Percival), fearing that a chance shot might cut the shrouds and let the Admiral fall, sent a quartermaster aloft who



passed one end of a signal halyard around the Admiral and made him fast to the mainyard, so that there was no danger from that source. And Admiral Farragut was so completely absorbed in the fight that he did not discover what had been done until he came to descend after we had passed the forts.

The rebels now opened from the guns of the water batteries, eight inch guns and Armstrong rifles, which being on a level with the ships, did fearful execution. The Monongahela was struck many times, and Lieutenant Prentiss (Roderick), her executive officer, had his right leg torn off by a whole shell, and Captain Mullany (J. R. M.), of the Oneida, lost an arm in the same way. The latter vessel was struck by a heavy shell which, having penetrated completely through the chain armor and side of the vessel, exploded in her starboard boiler, instantly filling her engine and fire-rooms with steam. Every one of the fire-room gang was disabled, many being instantly killed by inhaling the vapor, and some of the bodies presented the ghastly spectacle of white bones from which the flesh had been stripped by the boiling steam. The vessel was disabled and



was towed in by her consort, the Galena, nevertheless keeping her guns going steadily. A two hundred pounder shell, on its upward ricochet from the water, struck the port sill of the Lackawanna under the three hundred pounder rifle and killed and wounded one half of its crew, including Lieutenant McCarty (S. A.), who was struck by a flying splinter and badly hurt. The shell then went overboard through the foremast without exploding. The other vessels got their fair share of attention from the enemy, but were not disabled.

The ram Tennessee started out from behind the fort just before the head of the line was abreast of it, intending to attack the fleet seriatim; but, receiving two or three broadsides, changed her course and ran back again closely followed by the monitor Tecumseh. As the latter neared the fort, pounding away at the ram with fifteen inch solid shot, she struck a floating cask torpedo and exploded it. As was afterwards ascertained by the divers, the explosion tore a hole in her bottom more than twenty feet square, and she sank like a stone—turning over as she went down in eight fathoms of water. By this



frightful disaster one hundred and ten out of one hundred and twenty men were lost in a single instant. Commander Tunis A. M. Craven, one of the most gallant officers in the service, lost his life through his noble disregard of self. He was in the pilot house with the pilot, close to the only opening in the whole ship, and this was only large enough to allow one man to pass at once. Captain Craven was already partly out, when the pilot grasped him by the leg, and cried "Let me get out first, Captain for God's sake; I have five little children!" The Captain drew back, saying "Go on, sir," gave him his place, and went down with his ship, while the pilot was saved. A week afterwards, when the divers went down to examine the wreck, they found nearly all the crew at their posts, as they sank. The chief engineer, who had been married in New York only two weeks before, and who had received from the flag-ship's mail his letters while the line was forming, stood with one hand upon the revolving bar of the turret engine, and in the other an open letter from his bride, which his dead eyes still seemed to be reading.



By this time, the fleet was nearly past the forts, and the head of the line about crossing the middle ground, the ram still lying quietly under the guns of the fort. Cheer after cheer rent the air from hundreds of lusty throats, as the ships came, two by two, inside the bay, the goal we had been longing for so eagerly for three long years. Comrades shook hands, congratulated each other and hurraed until hoarse. The wounded were brought up from below and comfortably stowed away in cots, and the dead were decently composed for their long, last sleep, on the port side of the berth deck forward.

But all too soon ; for another, and for us the hardest tug, was yet to come. Admiral Buchanan, in the Tennessee, had made up his mind to attack the whole fleet, and as her officers said afterwards, do his best and sink his ship with all hands or conquer. On she came, steadily and fast, paying no more attention to the terrible fire that was concentrated upon her from the entire fleet than to so many hail stones, and attempted to ram several of the large ships. Having cast loose from their consorts, they were too fast for her, and she did not manage to strike a



single one. Soon the monitors came up, and solid eleven and fifteen inch shot struck her a dozen a minute from a range of less than a hundred yards without the slightest effect, she blazing away with her battery of seven inch Brooks rifles. Never was ship more gallantly fought against more fearful odds. Finding what small impression our fire was making upon her, the Admiral now signalled the Lackawanna, Monongahela and Ossipee, "Run down the rebel ram." Four bells—"go ahead, full speed,"—rang from the bridge, the captain's post, and we went at her. The Monongahela missed her aim the first time, striking obliquely a glancing blow with no harmful effect to either. The Lackawanna was more fortunate and delivered a fair blow, going at the tremendous speed of fourteen knots, just where the iron house joined the main deck, with a shock that prostrated every man on deck and tore to atoms her solid oak bow for six feet as if it had been paper. No more damage was done the ram by this tremendous blow than if a lady had laid her finger upon the iron sheathing, and a careful inspection of the spot where the contact occurred, made directly



after the surrender, showed for the sole result a few oaken fibres forced directly into the iron. The Lackawanna backed clear of the Tennessee, when the latter swung around on our port beam and delivered her broadside into us at three feet distance, at the same time receiving the fire of the only gun that could be sufficiently depressed to reach her, our deck being several feet higher out of water than hers. Her shell, ninety-eight pounder percussion, all exploded on the berth deck, just as they entered the ship, entirely destroying the powder division, with the exception of the officer in command, Ensign Rathbone (Clarence), who was wounded by flying splinters. The surgeon's steward and one nurse were torn into such small pieces that no part of either of them was ever identified.

The scene on the berth deck was dismal enough. So full of smoke that where a moment before was a crowd of busy men, nothing was visible except the red glare of the blazing woodwork which had taken fire from the exploding shell, with no sound beside the groans of the wounded and dying and the thunder of cannon overhead, a new element of horror was



added by the news that the magazine was on fire! In that chamber were stored seventeen tons of gunpowder, and if the flames reached that, our shrift were short indeed. In the magazine of a man-of-war, the powder is put up in cartridges of red flannel, of various sizes, and these are stored for greater safety in copper canisters, each containing about one hundred pounds. In passing up the cartridges to the boys whose duty it was to carry them to the guns, and who are called powder monkeys, the gunner had shaken out on the floor of the magazine passage a small quantity of powder which lay in little heaps along the passage, a long narrow way leading from the berth deck to the main chamber. From one of these little heaps to another, and around the prostrate form of the gunner, who had been stunned by the concussion, flame was flashing toward the deadly mass, when the ship's armorèr, George Taylor, came at a leap down from the spar deck, and seeing at a glance the deadly peril, sprang down into the passage and extinguished the fire with his naked hands, burning them to the bone in the process—but saving all our lives and the brave old



ship. How many men would have had the pluck to go down into a magazine full of powder, a part of which was actually burning, and take the chances of being able to put it out with his naked hands, is a problem which I leave you to solve. The gallant tar was publicly thanked the next day by Captain Marchand (J. B.) before the entire crew, and subsequently received the medal of honor which Congress voted for acts of special bravery.\*

Then the *Monongahela* returned to the attack and struck the ram fairly amidships, only injuring herself by the blow. The rebel officers were astounded at the audacity of wooden ships attacking their vessel in this way, they expecting that the ironclads would alone dare to fight them. The ram now stood away for the fort, followed by the whole fleet and almost covered with shot. Her smoke stack was gone level with the deck, her steering gear, which,

\* From "The Record of the Medals of Honor issued to the Blue Jackets and Marines of the Navy, under the authority of the Congress of the United States, for Deeds of Gallantry and Heroism in times of War and of Peace":—

"GEORGE TAYLOR, armorer on board of the United States steamer 'Lackawanna,' although wounded, went into the shell-room and with his hands extinguished the fire from a shell exploded over it by the enemy."



by some unaccountable stupidity, was rove on deck instead of below, was shot away, and, at ten o'clock precisely, she hauled down her colors, and ran up the white flag, amidst thundering cheers from all hands of us, and feelings of indescribable exultation. Admiral Buchanan handed his sword to Lieutenant Giraud, temporarily of the Ossipee, who ran up the stars and stripes and carried the sword to the gallant Farragut on board the Hartford. Admiral Buchanan being wounded in the leg by a splinter, the ship was given up by her commander, Captain Johnson (J. D.), with the assurance that if the officers had had their way, the ship would have been blown up before surrender, but that the men got wind of their intention and prevented it.

During the latter part of the engagement, the Metacomet, under Lieutenant Commander James E. Jouett, chased the rebel gunboat Selma up the bay, and, going two knots to her one, speedily overhauled her. After a running fight and the reception of two broadsides, Captain Murphy (P. U.) hauled down his colors and surrendered, — himself wounded, his first lieutenant killed, and one-third of his crew



hors du combat. The Morgan escaped up the bay to Mobile, and the Gaines, the last of Admiral Buchanan's fleet, was run ashore and set on fire by her crew, who then escaped into the woods.

Thus ended this glorious battle, with a glorious victory the hardest fought naval engagement of the war, and, as was said by foreign critics, one of the fiercest on record. Indeed, it was the only one of the rebellion, except the duel of the Kearsarge and Alabama, when ships met ships fairly. It gave us entire possession of the harbor, cutting off the most available source of rebel supply from abroad, capturing their famous ram and whole fleet, thereby proving the hollowness of Admiral Buchanan's boast, "That he would sink every one of Farragut's ships or blow them out of water," and establishing the maxim that no shore fortifications, however strong, can stop the passage of a well-handled fleet of war ships. This can only be effected by a system of torpedoes, which, in 1864, were not understood as now.

During the passage of the forts, the spectacle of the naval engagement from shore was so superb,



that the troops, which were fighting at Fort Gaines, on Dauphin Island, suspended operations by mutual consent for two hours, and watched the ships. About midnight the rebels evacuated and blew up Fort Powell, giving us a clear passage to New Orleans via Mississippi Sound, and completely isolating Fort Gaines, which surrendered to Admiral Farragut the next day.

It was this gallant fight which, in the opinion of the "British Army and Navy Journal," the leading military authority in Europe, placed the noble Farragut at the head of the living naval commanders of the world, and gave him equal fame with Nelson. Greater praise from Englishmen, there could be none. The loss of the fleet, excluding the *Tecumseh*, was fifty-two killed, two hundred severely wounded and about two hundred more slightly hurt.

It was wonderful to witness the courage of the men who were mortally wounded. One of our quarter-gunners who had both arms shot away above the elbows, and was supposed to be dead from the shock, astonished me by asking, while I was attending a man near by, "Have we got in yet, sir?"



"Yes," I replied, "we have, thank God?" "Then hurrah for our Admiral!" he exclaimed, and was dead in a moment afterward.

The next morning, the Admiral issued the following general order, which was read on board each ship while yet our dead were with us, and while the marks of the fight on every hand so powerfully emphasized the words:

"FLAGSHIP HARTFORD, }  
MOBILE BAY, August 6th, 1864. }

"The Admiral returns thanks to the officers and crews of the Fleet for their gallant conduct during the fight. It has never been his good fortune to see men do their duty with more cheerfulness, for, although they knew the enemy was prepared with all devilish means for their destruction, and witnessed the almost instantaneous annihilation of our gallant companions in the *Tecumseh* by a torpedo, and the slaughter of their friends and messmates and gunmates, still there was not the slightest evidence of hesitation to follow your Commander-in-chief through the line of torpedoes and obstructions of which we knew nothing, except from the exaggerations of the enemy, 'that we would be blown up, as certainly as we attempted to enter.' For this blind confidence in your leader, he thanks you.

D. G. FARRAGUT, *Rear Admiral.*"



And again, General Order No. 13 :

“FLAGSHIP HARTFORD,  
SUNDAY MORNING, August 7th, 1864. } ”

“The Admiral desires the Fleet to return thanks to Almighty God for the signal victory over the enemy on the morning of the 5th instant.

D. G. FARRAGUT, *Rear Admiral.*”



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION.

BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 9.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.



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1879.

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PERSONAL INCIDENTS  
IN THE EARLY CAMPAIGNS OF THE  
THIRD REGIMENT  
RHODE ISLAND VOLUNTEERS  
AND THE  
TENTH ARMY CORPS.

BY

EDWIN METCALF,  
(Late Colonel Third Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers.)

PROVIDENCE  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.  
1879.



PERSONAL INCIDENTS  
IN THE  
EARLY CAMPAIGNS OF THE THIRD REGIMENT RHODE ISLAND  
VOLUNTEERS AND THE TENTH ARMY CORPS.

[Read before the Society, May 3rd, 1876.]

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MR. PRESIDENT AND COMRADES:

You will agree with me in thinking that an apology for the disconnected sketches thrown together in this paper, however much it may be needed, comes with poor grace from one who has nobody to blame but himself for his shortcomings. I will not apologize, therefore, but content myself with reminding you that my subject was announced a month ago in deference to a custom wisely established, but which I might well have departed from for two weighty reasons. One of these reasons is, that not only had I never written a single sketch of the incidents my title called for, but that I was pretty certain I had no papers giving dates or other



reminiscences of the events I wished to bring before you. The second is, that under the circumstances in which I knew myself placed, I could not command the time to look over old letters which might possibly aid me, or to consult any of the numerous histories of the war where some stimulant to fading recollection might be discovered.

Perhaps I ought to confess that I did turn the leaves of one of the latest of these histories to see what was thought worth printing about operations in which I was personally interested. You will judge what aid and comfort I derived from this investigation when I inform you, that while acknowledging the gallant and successful execution of a flank movement by soldiers from Rhode Island, the author forgets to give, if he must in charity be supposed to have known, the name of a single officer connected with that command. And yet, upon that little enterprise rests all my hopes of military fame! Nay, the campaign, of which this was the crowning glory, comprised nearly all the services performed by the Third Rhode Island, as an infantry regiment. And such is fame. But I resist the temptation to



moralize on that fleeting theme. No doubt many of my hearers have had occasion to indulge themselves in remarks more or less pertinent to similar circumstances. They will the better appreciate my silence, and readily pass with me to the consideration of more tangible matters. Does anybody here ask himself how an old fellow like me, happened to get into military life? The question would be natural enough and easily answered. In one sense, it was a mere accident. Like other professional men, who are usually better known to the public than men in other pursuits, I could not be ignorant of the fact that my example in volunteering, would be appreciated by the State authorities. But I had a family who would be left wholly unprovided for, if I lost my life. Perhaps it was unmanly, but that thought alone kept me from enlisting at the first call. When the demand for volunteers became more urgent, and the Governor complained that the men he would select for officers, did not come forward, I felt it a duty to say to him, "They will come if you bid them come." To his question whether that meant that I would accept a subordinate position, if invited,



but one answer could be returned. The result was the tender of a commission as major in the Third Regiment, then nearly complete, actually organized by the efficient Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Blanding, but under the nominal command of an army officer, Colonel Eddy, who never accepted the position.

The Third Regiment was raised in the summer of 1861, while the public mind was still wrought up to the intensity of feeling created by the disaster at Bull Run. Its organization was in many respects peculiar, and the rather public display of reckless conduct on the part of both officers and enlisted men at the outset, gave it an unfortunate name and an undeserved reputation. It is needlèss, before a Rhode Island audience, to say that the regiment now needs no vindication. No man ever regretted his connection with it. The large element of foreign blood, which was dreaded as a source of weakness, proved to be the sure foundation of its strength. A chapter of exceeding interest to us who still cling so closely to our prejudices against foreign birth, might be written in this connection. But I forbear. I



shall surely wander far enough from personal incidents before I reach the close of my paper, without vaunting the gallantry and patriotism of my Irish, English and German comrades.

One of the early misfortunes of the Third, was its failure to be incorporated into the army set apart for operations under General Burnside. We felt as if it was a sort of favoritism which lost us the opportunity given to the Fourth and Fifth Regiments, and that feeling gave a tone to all regimental criticisms for a considerable period, until we had learned to appreciate the character of the commander who organized and led what was styled, I believe, the "Expeditionary Corps." General Sherman, true to his Rhode Island birth and training, and with a firm faith in Rhode Island pluck and character, at once devoted our regiment to a special service, and gave it a remarkably independent position. To be sure, this rendered necessary the transformation of the regiment from an infantry to a heavy artillery organization, and in the end belittled the importance of its regimental officers. But for this there was compensation in the magnitude of the command and



especially in the multitude of its officers,—a circumstance of no slight importance when the system of promotion from the ranks became so happily established.

I have sometimes thought that full justice has not been done to General Thomas W. Sherman. His name is overshadowed by that of his great namesake. He did not possess the qualities or exhibit the manners which easily command popularity. In fact, he often seemed to prefer an ill-natured criticism to a flattering compliment from a newspaper correspondent. A long and perhaps hard experience in the army, had taught him to yield obedience, absolute and unhesitating, and when put in power, he rigorously exacted such obedience from others. The immediate result was, of course, unlimited grumbling from volunteers, as yet wholly unacquainted with discipline. But he was an admirable soldier, familiar with every detail of a soldier's duty, and capable of instructing others in the discharge of their duty, however important or however trivial, and such instruction he never failed to give to any who had the sense to seek and to accept it. Vigor-



ous in enforcing regard for authority, he never overlooked preparation for the care and comfort of his men, nor spared the officer who neglected those under his command. His staff, with the single exception of his medical director, I believe, was composed of very young men. Undoubtedly, he taxed their activity and energy to the utmost, and made small allowance for their inexperience. Many a story can be told of him to illustrate this. But the result was that his work was all well done, and no headquarters throughout the army, probably, had a higher or better deserved reputation for ability and efficiency. It hardly needs to be added that under the training of such a commander, raw recruits rapidly attained proficiency in drill and something of that discipline which distinguishes soldiers from militia. And yet, General Sherman had won no great success on the southern coast. In co-operation with the navy, he took possession of all the islands and held the approaches to all the available harbors south of Charleston; but for this a force of five thousand ought to have been as effective as fifteen thousand. Charleston was what we wanted, and I



## 12 PERSONAL INCIDENTS IN EARLY CAMPAIGNS

thought when we landed on Hilton Head, that the men we had, could march into Charleston. I think so now. I suppose General Sherman thought so, and never doubted he would have been in Charleston before Christmas, 1861, if his superior at the head of the Army of the Potomac, or at the War Office, had consented.

So thinking, as a Rhode Islander, I for one was not disposed to admire the wisdom that led to his removal from his high command. Certainly, the order at best was ill timed. The skillful plans for the siege and reduction of Fort Pulaski had all been arranged under his direction, and were ripe for successful execution. It was an insult to as good a soldier and as true a patriot as the nation can boast, which was consummated when he was deprived of the opportunity of witnessing and rejoicing in the downfall of that important fortress.

It chanced, however, that those of us who had spent the winter in idleness at Hilton Head, welcomed any change which promised occupation. A new general meant, of course, new demonstrations, new expeditions, and rumor had it that his chief of



staff was to be not only actual commander of the forces in the field, but a fighting man. No sooner, therefore, was the reduction of Pulaski complete, and the troops once more disengaged, than movements were set on foot of which no one knew the object, but every one guessed they meant nothing less than the capture of Charleston.

I don't know as you will believe it, comrades, though I do say it—it is a weakness often noticed among Rhode Island veterans, this want of implicit faith in their fellow man; I don't marvel at it; not at all; I respect the feeling—still, I tell you the truth. I am not proud. You think the laugh comes in here? By no means. The place for that is further on, as I will proceed at once to show you. Our regiment was commanded—that's the word,—commanded—by one of the best soldiers Rhode Island sent to do her honor. Nathaniel W. Brown was not a colonel merely, he was a commander. He was my good friend before and after we served together, but like others, both wise and able and just according to their light, he thought a friend could be as serviceable to him and to the regiment, in the third as in



the second position. And so he named a lieutenant colonel who had held command and seen service already, secured his appointment at the expense of his inexperienced major, and with his consent, because, as I said, and as you know, that major was not proud. And while we are thinking of it, what had a major to be proud of, who took his commission in August, and for ten months had been waiting for a chance to be shot at? I remember now, in communications somewhat freely written to the executive authorities at home, offering pretty zealously I think, at times, to prove that I was not proud, and to exchange my rank for that of captain of a light battery. I wonder if those letters were preserved. I shouldn't wonder if the "little War-Governor" thought that majors would be poor stuff to make battery commanders of. On the whole, I should agree with him.

Speaking of the Governor, reminds me that I owe to him one of the most pleasing and exciting incidents of the war,—my personal introduction to the Army of the Potomac before Yorktown. How much I was impressed with its pomp, its magnitude,



its power, its inefficiency for the work it was then undertaking, this is no time to say. Accepted as a volunteer staff officer, to aid in hastening to the front artillery and ordnance stores, I saw enough to satisfy me that if that arm of the service had been handled in that way in the Department of the South, court martials would have been speedy and vacancies numerous in the Third Rhode Island. But this is vicious scandal, and I beg pardon of my more fortunate comrades who love and honor their old commander. And I ought to thank him for giving me the opportunity,—think of it, my friends,—six months and more in service and this my first opportunity to hear the music of a rifle ball. Sometimes since then, I've doubted its musical character. That day I visited the advanced posts before Yorktown, I was bound to believe in it. There were governors and generals and dignitaries of all grades, accustomed, or pretending to be accustomed, to those insinuating tones. Is it conceivable that a stray major from the south, generously supposed to be familiar with no projectile smaller than an eight-inch shell or a thirty-pounder parrot, would fail to



enjoy the "Sharpshooters' Serenade." Doubt it, if you will. But in all seriousness, I assure you, that idle exposure of life was worth to me all the experience of all the weary months in camp and garrison, and all the lessons I had taken or given in the discipline of a soldier.

This little episode was over, and the senior major of the Third Regiment was diligently killing time with the help of two juniors, in their pleasant sandy entrenchments at Hilton Head, before General Hunter planned his advance upon Charleston. How well I remember the day it was announced to my colonel by the Post Commander, who was to go in command of a brigade, of which six companies of the Third were to form an infantry battalion, the other companies being detained as garrisons at the various posts, where their services as artillery were indispensable. How hard it was to convince Colonel Brown that his battalion must go without him, and he be content to take command of the post at Hilton Head! And then came the announcement that made me the proudest man in all that army. The major at last had a command. Six companies and a junior major! Yes, I was very proud, and not altogether without



reason. I have seen many a colonel who would have been glad to exchange his entire regiment for that battalion, and have done a good deal smarter thing at that, than most colonels ever did.

If you will fancy a brigade encamped in such pleasant spots as each detachment had been fortunate enough to discover on landing upon the little island of Edisto, let me introduce you to what, strange as it may seem to you, well drilled infantry officers, I may properly style the first personal incident of the campaign;—you would never guess what it was, and only out of politeness to me, believe it when you are told. My friends, it was only my first battalion drill; yes, it was not only my first introduction of myself to my officers and men, their first chance of learning my voice and my ways, but it was absolutely my first opportunity to test my little stock of knowledge gained from books, and to apply the few hints I had obtained from others. That same battalion drill is pretty amusement. I have spent odd hours at it since, agreeably and profitably to myself and others. But if you think it was a pleasant incident in my first experience as commander, you are



sadly mistaken. Recollect what was my responsibility, and what my time for preparation! Four or five hundred men, whose conduct and safety depended in good degree upon my ability to lead and direct them, and three or four days at most in which to teach them how I proposed to do it, and to show them that I had such knowledge, coolness, promptness, decision and authority, as to challenge their confidence and induce them to follow me as a leader whom they could not desert without disgrace. I suppose military drill and discipline means something like that, does it not? At any rate, I felt so then, and have never been ashamed of the feeling. The drill was far from a brilliant success, I am quite sure. Nor were the movements when repeated shortly after in presence of an enemy, altogether precise. I have seen them more handsomely executed by home guards. In fact, guides were not regularly posted, nor the alignments by any means perfect, as I now remember, but they served their purpose. The proper commands were given and promptly obeyed. The purpose of those battalion drills, and of all drills and discipline, as I under-



stand it, was answered. I thank God for that little resting spell on Edisto Island — that campaign incident as I have ventured to term it. Had one of those four or five hundred men come to harm because I had failed to teach him the tone of voice, the word of command, on which his safety and that of others might depend in the hour of danger, how should I have ever dared to stand up before him or his comrades and pretend to be their officer and leader? Unfortunately, I can make no such pretensions. But my few opportunities enabled me to honor those who justly may. I understand with what manly pride an officer, knowing himself and his men,—his look and voice and being known to every one of them,—with what pride and joy such an officer leads his men into danger,—nay, if it must be, unto death.

Another incident of this campaign I regret my inability to present as I had hoped and intended to do. It is one never likely to be forgotten by the thousands who took part in it, but I find it impossible to make it life-like and real without some assistance in recalling surrounding circumstances, and in



introducing individual traits of character. But I must make the attempt, however poorly I am likely to succeed. It was on our march across John's Island. Through somebody's blunder, there was a scarcity of transports adapted to the shallow waters in those parts, and the troops were collected at a point supposed to be beyond the enemy's observation, preparatory to a forced march to the scene of military operations on James Island. Here, after a halt and preparations for a night's bivouac, occurred one of those mistakes, which, however harmless to others, I suppose no man ever really forgives himself for committing. I received a sudden summons to get my command into line, and foolishly supposing it was to be in marching order, I wasted two or three minutes in strapping knapsacks and blankets. Judge of my feelings when, taking my place in line, I found that nothing was going on except a review, and that a regiment whose colonel was sharp enough to suspect it, had preceded me, and thus obtained the right of the line for the midnight march that was to follow. It was small consolation to know that the brigade commander had a liking for the Rhode



Island boys and wished them at the head of the column. You may believe my positive assertion that the Third Rhode Island never played second again.

If I could only describe that midnight march! You all see that that is the effective incident I am so anxious to bring out into full view, and have no words to do it with. You understand that it had been timed so that the column should reach the landing, be ferried over to James Island, effect a junction with other troops arriving by water, and before daybreak advance upon the works of an enemy surprised and unable to resist. Then, a short, victorious march to Charleston, and the whole sea coast is ours! How simple, easy, natural—how well contrived, how impossible to fail! Alas! no; success was very certain—if it should not rain, and it did rain. In June, rains will come in South Carolina and when they come, men's plans always fail if they won't stand drowning. My horse did not drown, perhaps because he was born to be shot. I stand a good deal of drowning myself, having tried it in early childhood and made a failure of it even then, and my men would have been ashamed to do anything



but follow me that night. How the water did pour ! how the road deepened and lengthened, until a march that would without fatigue have ended long before daybreak, was not over at nine o'clock in the morning. And when it was over, and we all snugly quartered in the church, houses and barns of a deserted village, the failure of the well contrived plan of operations was the last thing we thought of. Indeed, that was not a matter of the slightest importance to us just then.

Do you understand what had happened? Something that history tells us too little of, but that ought to be put into history, and repeated, until no soldier of the future shall have excuse for forgetting it. What had happened was simply this — our entire little army was foundered. It had marched itself off its feet, or to put it more truthfully, had marched its feet off. 'Twas only five or six miles, but in that rain it was enough. Do you know, any of you, what this means? 'Tis very pitiful. I saw the hardest in my command, proud, self-reliant officers and men, sit down and cry like children while they cut off their shoes, and then dragged



themselves along to shelter. The very heart had gone out of them in that short march. Had an enemy come upon them, they had fallen almost without resistance. Nor was it possible for them to move again until three days of careful nursing and a general distribution of new shoes, put them once more in marching order.

This is the incident which led to the occupation of that peaceful village of Legareville, of which some of you may have heard. Thanks to the rebel affection for themselves and their property, we had roofs over our heads. Battalion headquarters, I remember, were sumptuously supplied with a bedstead, condemned as unfit for firewood and held together by the sharpest bed cord I ever made acquaintance with, upon which the commanding officer was compelled to sleep, because his staff were too proud to sleep on the floor or to let him do so. And then the church! how naturally good Yankee citizens seemed to take to sacrilege, if the way they crowded pulpit and pews alike, was sacrilegious! I take none of the discredit for these peccadilloes to myself. Rather do I apologise to our worthy cabinet keeper,



for rejecting the spoil of a neighboring planter's house, kindly presented to me by my contraband servant, who then and always maintained the dignity of the headquarters by earning the reputation of being the best and boldest forager in the command.

One more incident lingers in my memory, and with its recital I will hasten to conclude my paper. Our period of rest after the disastrous night march just described, terminated late a pleasant Sunday afternoon in June, when we accompanied our brigade commander across the Stono River to James Island. Landing at dusk, we received an order to proceed at once into an adjacent forest and relieve a regiment doing picket and outpost duty. Darkness steps in so quickly in that region, that I hurried forward the head of my column and went to the rear on foot to see that the companies closed up and followed as soon as landed. It was not altogether a success. Belated movements on new ground are quite apt to prove unsatisfactory to some of the parties concerned. In this instance, the misfortune befel one of my best officers, then recently promoted, and not only a general favorite but a perfect model in the



way of literal obedience to orders. Making my way to the front as rapidly as possible, I came by the head of his company just in time to see that, owing probably to the fading light, he had slightly missed the direction and was not closely following the column; and at the same instant to hear from our brigadier the ominous words, "Report yourself in arrest at once, sir." How those words cut him, I knew well enough, and though the blunder was forgiven and forgotten next morning, he was the unhappiest man in the department for many a day. He might have considered himself, as the rest of us did, a lucky fellow for escaping our miserable plight that night. But I suppose any officer worthy the name, would prefer the chance of being shot to an arrest in presence of his men, even though for nothing more serious than an imaginary offense. Without further interference or other obstacle than the increasing darkness, we reached the woods and relieved our friends. I say friends, because they could not have been rebels, since they retired in the direction from which we had come. But their voices we did not know, and their faces we could not see.



They managed in the utter darkness, how I never quite comprehended, to lead squads of our men to the picket stations they had occupied, and hastily retreated to such supper and lodgings as they might haply find at a more convenient distance from the enemy. That is, if there were any enemy. Not the remotest idea had any one of us, whether there was an enemy within miles of us, or in what direction to look for him if there was one. A visit or two to the outposts developed the pleasing certainty that firing from one would be pretty certain to endanger the other. But this consideration did not seem of much importance when the night became so black that nothing could be seen, not even an object in motion, much less a man's face, or his musket. Then came a rain that filled a musket barrel before a sergeant could go along his squad and see the arms were secured. And the battalion commander began to reflect, rather late, what was he to do with all of his men huddled together in that thick wood, if an enemy who knew the ground, should make an attack. Wasn't that a pleasant reflection for a man making his first tour of picket duty, and certain of only one



thing, that he was exposing to possible danger three or four times as many men as could be of any use, and at the same time so blinded by rain and darkness as to feel actually incapable of marching any part of his force to a place of greater security.

Relief came from an unexpected quarter. An enemy approached one of the outposts, was challenged, and fired, wounding one brave fellow, a sturdy old sergeant in the British army, and then my men played militiamen and fired into the air, and kept on firing until I have no doubt they started the long roll in every rebel camp south of Charleston. I have laughed to myself a thousand times since at the supreme folly of that firing. My superior laughed at it the next morning, and commended our good behavior,—heaven save the mark. I felt then as if I deserved to be cashiered for a fool, and privately, I must say, I feel very much the same now.

And yet, I wonder to this day, not so much how the firing started and kept up, as how I succeeded in stopping it at all. The noise and the little excitement such noise so naturally produces, were exceedingly refreshing. It seemed to drive away the de-



pression and stupidity caused by the darkness and wet, and the flashes of the powder lighted up faces around you for an instant and so brought back the reality of human companionship once more. I don't know as I asked myself whether I was or had been nervous and frightened, but I recollect very well of thinking that none of my officers or men were so affected, and of rejoicing in that thought.

Somehow I stopped that firing, or rather perhaps it stopped of itself, though I seem to have a recollection of shouting to stop it. Then came the sad news that poor Brophy was wounded, and with the necessity for removing him came energy enough to assume the responsibility of withdrawing the outposts. The entire force was at the same time drawn up until daylight in a position apparently quite as certain to prevent the advance of an enemy, and more secure from attack if one were attempted. Shall I confess that but for the tragic ending of this farcical midnight engagement, in the death of our wounded comrade a few days afterwards, a death due to want of care and skill at the hospital to which he was sent, possibly, rather than



his wound, I should very likely have come to the conclusion that no enemy approached us that night, and that the whole disturbance was caused by a careless discharge of a musket by one of our own men. But I don't want to have his death laid to the charge of any one of us, and so I must stick to the story as it was first told and believed around the camp fires of the Third.

Or was it never told? It occurs to me now that of all the number whom I have greeted since the war was over, not one has ever reminded me of that villainous firing. Perhaps they have their version of it, in which the present writer figures in even a worse light than here presented. I shall not stop to ask. Whatever they may have thought of their major that night or on any previous occasion, if it was to his discredit, I am sure they forgave it and forgot it a few days later, when together they faced death at the battle of James Island.

And now that I have performed my allotted task, let me hope that you, Mr. President and comrades, will join with me in saying that the apology with which I had thought of introducing myself this



evening, would have been out of place. Not that I thus boldly ask a compliment for what I have written. My meaning is something very different from that; you all understand it so. My personal reminiscences are trivial in themselves, of little permanent interest to myself, of no interest to any one else. I have spent an evening in reducing them into form, not because they have either interest or value, but because I want the right to urge others to give us something out of their store of personal incidents, which I know and you know, and all of our comrades ought to know and feel, will be alike interesting and valuable, not only to us, but to the great public who will some day enjoy the fruits of our labors.

There are hundreds of thrilling incidents connected with the great battlefields of the war,—Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Antietam, Gettysburg, and a dozen more,—which can be related nowhere better, more touchingly or eloquently than in such papers as comrades now living in Rhode Island can prepare. I think they owe it to the state, the nation, to us and to themselves, to make the attempt.



Rhetorical finish is of no consequence. The historian of the future will give that at his pleasure. All that is wanted now, is facts and the impressions those facts made at the time upon the mind of the writer. I have heard such papers read here and in posts of the Grand Army of the Republic as to me were more attractive than the most exciting romance. What is true of myself in this regard, I believe is true of very many others. And to add what influence my example may possibly have, has been my only excuse for inflicting upon you what is so trivial and commonplace as the sketches I have given necessarily are.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF THE  
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING  
PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 10.

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

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# BATTLE OF THE MINE.

BY

ERVIN T. CASE,

(Late Captain Ninth New Hampshire Volunteers.)



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SIDNEY S. RIDER.

1879.



## BATTLE OF THE MINE.

[Read before the Society, February 9th, 1876.]

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I HAVE selected as the subject for a half hour's discourse, and, I trust, entertainment and profit, the "Battle of the Mine," or as it is sometimes called, the battle of "Cemetery Hill," or the "Crater," which was fought in front of Petersburg, Virginia, July thirtieth, 1864, and formed one of the series of engagements and seige operations around Richmond and Petersburg, by which General Grant fastened and tightened his grasp upon the throat of the rebel confederacy, which resulted in the capture of those cities and terminated at last under the apple tree at Appomattox.

This engagement, it is true, will never occupy a prominent place in the large catalogue of the battles of the war of the rebellion, either from its magni-



tude, for it was fought on a very limited extent of territory and between comparatively a small number of troops, (there being at no time over fifteen thousand men actively engaged upon either side,) or for its results, for these consisted mainly in a heavy loss to the union army of brave men, and in bickerings and estrangement between officers high in rank and command, that betokened and ended in no good to our cause, and without any compensatory injury to the enemy. It was not a turning point in a campaign, like Antietam and Gettysburg, and thus rendered memorable. It was not a victory for us or even a drawn battle, but a miserable failure.

I have chosen it as my theme for other reasons than these. First, because I deemed it might not be wholly uninteresting to a Rhode Island audience from the fact that it was planned by, and fought under the command of one whom Rhode Island is proud to claim and to honor, and closed, so far as the war of the rebellion was concerned, a military career always honorable, generally successful and brilliant, and which will derive new lustre in the light of future history, when the rubbish of calumny



and jealousy shall have been cleared away, and the true value of the military service, as well as the true nobility of character and exalted patriotism of General Burnside, shall be fully appreciated and render his name everywhere, as it is now where his services are best known, a household word. Secondly, because the published statements and criticisms of this engagement are so strongly conflicting and contradictory, and, in many instances, so grossly inaccurate and unjust, that having participated in the action, and in a position such that I can say of it in the language of another, "All of which I saw, a part of which I was," I have ever been desirous to place upon record, so far as I might in my humble capacity, a true account of what passed under my own observation at the time, as I recall them in memory to-day; without assuming, however, the part of a military critic in regard to it, but with the sole desire of stating as correctly as possible, the facts as I saw them. And, thirdly, for the reason that though not a great battle, it was one of the most desperate of the war, and affords some of the most striking instances of personal daring and self-sacrifice that



occurred during the whole four years of conflict, replete throughout with instances of daring and devotion equal to any upon the pages of history. And it is my purpose to deal quite as much with these incidents of the battle, as with that portion of it which is already a matter of history.

The operations of the Army of the Potomac which preceded the "Battle of the Mine," during that memorable campaign of the spring and summer of 1864, are matters of history, and so familiar to you all that I need but refer to them briefly in passing. General Grant having been appointed to the command of the armies of the United States in March, 1864, had assumed the personal direction of the Army of the Potomac, and after reorganizing and reënfencing it, had crossed the Rapidan on the fifth day of May, with the declaration that he "intended to fight it out on that line, if it took all summer," and by a series of flank movements, arrived in front of Petersburg on the sixteenth of June, having fought during the five weeks, the battles of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, North Anna, Tolopotomy, Bethesda Church, and Cold Harbor, among the



fiercest and most sanguinary of the war. Although the army had become greatly reduced and worn out by incessant marching and fighting, an attack was at once ordered. After three days fighting, in which the enemy had been pushed back to within about a mile of the city of Petersburg, and into a line of earthworks from which it was found impossible to dislodge him by direct assault, General Grant abandoned the idea of the immediate capture of Petersburg and Richmond, and began at once to draw his lines of investment around the doomed cities, and the siege commenced. Petersburg, then a city of eighteen thousand inhabitants, is situated on the Appomattox river, twenty-three miles south of Richmond, and the two cities were so situated and connected that the fall of one almost necessarily involved the capture of the other. General Grant had determined to make Petersburg the principal point of attack, at the same time operating against Richmond on the north side of the James river. The position of the two lines in front of Petersburg at the time of the "Battle of the Mine," I will speak of as briefly as possible, although I can give you but



a faint idea, either of the natural situation of the field or of the works that covered it.

The Appomattox river runs nearly east past the city which is on its south side. About a mile and a half east or below the city, on the river, commenced the rebel line of works of which I shall speak, and which extended south, bearing a little to the west for about three miles. This line, of course, was not straight but was constructed so as to form all possible angles and to make available all the natural advantages of the position. Our first line was nearly parallel with this, and at some points not more than an hundred yards distant from it. Our second or main line, was half or three-fourths of a mile to the rear, and on higher ground, where several forts or earthworks had been constructed, which contained at the time of the battle, several seige guns, besides the regular field artillery of the army. At the point where the "Battle of the Mine" was fought there was a deep ravine between our first and second line, our front line being but a few yards from the crest of the ravine. This ravine or hollow, which at some places was quite wide, was comparatively protected



from the enemy's fire, but the slope between that and our rear line, was swept by the enemy's fire, both of artillery and musketry, so that troops going to the front line, were obliged to go under cover of the darkness of night, and even then, the loss was so great that a covered way was constructed by which they could go in safety. A little south-east of the city, about a mile from the river and about the same distance from the city, the rebels had constructed a fort in their front line and placed in it six pieces of artillery. This fort was only about four hundred feet from our front line. In fact, the lines were so near together that "Yank" and "Johnny" held many familiar chats with each other across the intervening space. The Ninth Corps, by which the "Battle of the Mine" was principally fought upon our side, occupied the lines directly in front of this fort. At the risk of wearying your patience with these dry details, I must ask you to keep in mind the situation as I have attempted to describe it, in order better to understand the description of the battle.

The Ninth Corps at this time consisted of four



divisions, the first, second and third being white troops and largely from New England, and the fourth composed of colored troops who, up to this time, had never been under fire, while the three white divisions had participated in every battle of the campaign and had become terribly reduced in numbers. For six weeks there had not been a day of rest, scarcely an hour of quiet. Morning, noon and midnight, the booming of their cannon and the rattling of their musketry echoed unceasingly through the Wilderness, around the hills of Spottsylvania, along the banks of the North Anna, and among the groves of Bethesda Church and Cold Harbor, and their ranks had again been decimated in front of Petersburg, in securing the position they now held, so that these divisions which crossed the Rapidan on the fifth of May twenty thousand strong, now numbered but about eight thousand effective men. I cannot give you the exact figures, but will give you the loss of my own regiment up to this time as an illustration of what the corps had suffered. We took into the first battle four hundred men, and in forty-two days our loss in killed and wounded, had been



upwards of three hundred and twenty-five, forty-two of whom were laid side by side in one grave beneath the trees of Spottsylvania. But notwithstanding these losses and hardships, such was their confidence in their true-hearted General Burnside, and such their devotion to the cause in which they were engaged, that they were ready and willing for any duty they might be called upon to perform. For reasons which will be stated hereafter, General Burnside decided to keep the fourth or colored division, in reserve, and thus all the arduous duty in the trenches fell upon the other three divisions; and more severe duty can hardly be imagined, for each alternate forty-eight hours was spent behind the front line of breastworks in the sand, without shelter and exposed to the enemy's fire unless we lay low, and the remainder of the time we were in the second line, where we were still exposed to the enemy's fire, and not a day passed without more or less loss in killed and wounded. Such was the condition of the corps when it went into position in front of Petersburg, and such its duty there for the six weeks previous to the battle.



Soon after our occupation of these lines, it occurred to the practical eye of an officer of the corps, Lieutenant-Colonel Pleasants, of the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania Regiment, that this fort which I have mentioned, could be mined and blown up by an explosion of gunpowder beneath it. Colonel Pleasants was a practical mining engineer before the war, and immediately taking his observations, he submitted his plan to General Burnside, who approved it, and he submitted it to General Meade, commanding the Army of the Potomac, who disapproved it. Permission or rather sufferance, however, was obtained from army head-quarters for the construction of the mine, and on the twenty-fifth day of June, Colonel Pleasants with his regiment, who were mostly miners, commenced the work. The mine commenced in the ravine of which I have spoken, and five hundred feet distant from the fort. It was apparent from the first, that no aid or encouragement would be received from General Meade. No instruments or tools could be obtained, and as the work progressed, the men were obliged to bring out every foot of earth excavated, by hand in hard-tack boxes,



as no wheelbarrows could be obtained. But with all these disadvantages, such was the energy and perseverance of Colonel Pleasants and his men, that in thirty days from the time they stuck the first spade into the earth, they had excavated a hole four feet wide, four and a half feet high, and five hundred and twenty feet long, extending under the doomed fort, and had constructed a chamber eighty feet long, in which were placed eight thousand pounds of powder. General Grant, who had not abandoned the idea that Petersburg might yet be carried by assault, determined to take advantage of the opportunity that would be afforded by the explosion of this mine to carry out his purpose, and therefore readily acceded to General Burnside's request, made soon after the work of constructing the mine commenced, to storm the enemy's works with the Ninth Corps, supported by other corps, in connection with the explosion of the mine. General Burnside at once laid his plans for the attack. The colored division was selected by him to lead the charge, and accordingly they were kept in reserve and in constant drill for such movements and service as would be required of them in



the attack, while the other divisions, which were to support the Fourth, were kept in constant service in the trenches. The mine was charged on the twenty-seventh of July, and on the twenty-eighth a demonstration was made in front of Richmond, to draw the enemy's attention.

The morning of the thirtieth, which had been fixed for the attack, was rapidly approaching, and General Burnside had completed his arrangements for it, and only waited for the moment to arrive which he had all confidence would place our army in possession of Petersburg and destroy Lee's army. On the afternoon of the twenty-ninth, while he was thus anxiously waiting, he was summoned to General Meade's head-quarters and informed that his plan was disapproved, and that the three divisions of white troops must make the attack and the fourth division act as a support. I shall not attempt to criticise this interference, but am content that the future shall base its judgment of it upon the testimony of General Grant before the "Committee on the Conduct of the War," in which he says: "General Burnside wanted to put his colored division in front, and I believe if



he had done so, it would have been a success, still I agreed with General Meade in his objection to that plan." The result of this change was to leave the colored division with its full ranks, about seven thousand men, who had been specially drilled for the duty, as a support, and put in the other three divisions, worn out and reduced to about the same strength numerically as the single colored division. But General Burnside had no alternative than to adopt the plan of General Meade, and he changed his orders accordingly.

Such was the situation as the night of the twenty-ninth of July closed in upon us. I remember standing in our rear line as the sun was sinking behind the hills beyond Petersburg, looking across the fields which on the morrow were to behold such carnage. Along the eminence where I stood, was a line of breastworks connecting a chain of forts, the guns in every one of which, more than a hundred in all, were already shotted and carefully trained upon the point of attack. From where I stood, the ground sloped gradually to the ravine of which I have spoken, through which in our front ran the bed of



the Weldon Railroad. Just across this ravine I could see our front line of breastworks, heavily built with traverses to protect the men who wearily stood guard behind it. A few hundred feet beyond frowned the fort, garrisoned by several hundred men, thirty feet beneath whom lay the four tons of powder waiting for the match. Between these lines, was a smooth plain or rather a gentle slope, rising towards the rebel lines, across which on the morrow we were to charge. Beyond the rebel line the ground still rose for half a mile, forming a crest upon which was a cemetery, giving it the name of "Cemetery Hill." This hill was to be the objective point of our attack, for it crowned the city, which was upon the farther slope leading down to the river, and whose tall spires cast their lengthened shadows in the light of the setting sun. I shall never forget till my dying day the scene or the thoughts that passed through my mind, as I stood there on that summer eve.

All the plans, of course, for the battle had been kept a profound secret except at the several army and corps headquarters, until late in the afternoon



it began to be whispered among the officers of the Ninth Corps, almost under their breath, that an important movement was about to be made, and of course all knew almost instinctively that the mine was about to be sprung and that it was to be followed by a grand attack upon the enemy's line of works. The information was conveyed to the officers of the regiment to which I belonged by the commanding officer as we gathered at his quarters, as was our wont, after dress parade, for we occasionally had dress parade when not on the front line. After passing a few moments with us pleasantly in social converse, he suddenly remarked, and I can remember as if it were but yesterday, the expression on his countenance and the tone of his voice, "Gentlemen, when you gather here to-morrow night, some of us will not be present; probably we shall never all meet here again," and then he gave us the plans of the battle so far as they had been communicated to him. But oh! how sadly true were his words. Of the dozen officers then present, on the morrow night five gathered in that lonely tent, but its occupant of the previous night was never more to meet



us there, having been one of the first to fall, severely wounded, as we crossed the enemy's line.

At one o'clock in the morning, the troops of the Ninth Corps were ordered into line and began to pass through the covered way to the ravine and into the position assigned them. The troops had all been withdrawn from the front line of works, they being too near the fort for safety at the time of the explosion, and massed just at the farther edge of the ravine and a little in rear of the breastworks; the second division, General Potter, on the right, the first, General Ledlie, in the centre, and the third, General Wilcox, on the left. The orders of General Burnside were that immediately upon the explosion, General Ledlie's division was to advance directly on the demolished fort, while General Potter was to move down the enemy's works to the right and General Wilcox on the left, while the sole idea pervading the whole of General Meade's orders and dispatches before and during the engagement, were to the effect that the troops were to be pushed forward at once to the crest of "Cemetery Hill." What he expected to accomplish by this movement,



without first driving the enemy from his front line to the right and left of the small break to be made by the explosion and subsequent passage of troops through the opening, requires a greater knowledge of military movements than I possess, to divine. Certain it is, and it would seem that it would have been apparent to any ordinary military mind, that every man that passed beyond the first line of the enemy's works through this expected opening, would be captured unless the line to the right and left could be forced to retire.

It fell to the lot of the regiment to which I belonged, to lead the column of General Potter's division, which was massed in column of regiments, and to occupy a position directly in front of the mine and the rebel fort, and nearer to it than any other troops. We were formed in a grove of trees upon the edge of the ravine, which grove was ordered, by General Burnside, at the solicitation of Colonel Monroe, (J. Albert,) Chief of Artillery of the Ninth Corps, to be cut down instantly upon the explosion, in order to give a better view of the enemy's line, and a detail of negroes from the fourth division



had been made for this purpose, and were standing at their allotted posts, axe in hand, to do the work assigned them; and here let me pay a tribute to the manner in which that duty was performed, for no sooner had the explosion occurred, than every man sprung to his place, two being assigned to the large and one to the smaller trees, and not a man left his post till every tree had fallen, though many of them fell at their posts, and in several instances where two were assigned the same tree, and one had fallen, the other remained till the work was done. Was there greater bravery displayed in the excitement and heat of the battle than this, although it was exhibited by men of sable hue, but of true and noble heart and nerve?

At three o'clock every regiment of the corps was in position, waiting for the explosion, which was to take place at half past three. Then came that terrible hour before the battle, which no one can understand or appreciate except those who have experienced it,—when every man is conscious that he is standing face to face with death, and knows that in a few moments many of his comrades true and tried



will sleep the sleep that knows no waking, it may be himself among the number. What thoughts of the past come thronging in his mind, what dread uncertainties of the future, what recollections of home and loved ones, of wife and children, of father, mother, and dear ones! I remember while thus waiting on this morning, noticing an officer of my regiment, one of the bravest of the brave, whom I had known from childhood, standing aloof from the rest, leaning upon his sword, the tears trickling down his cheek. Guessing the cause, I stepped up to him and placing my hand on his shoulder, said, trying to rally him: "Never mind, Lieutenant, you and I have been through many battles together, and always came out all right and I guess we will this time." I can never forget his look as he replied, "Captain, it ain't myself I am thinking of, for I can meet death like a man, but its my wife and four little children at home." These were the thoughts that passed through many a mind as we stood waiting the word of command.

At quarter past three o'clock the fuse attached to the powder in the mine was lighted. Anxiously we



waited, but no explosion followed. Half an hour passed, but all was silent as the grave—scarcely a whisper among the men. The only sound was the early song of the birds in the trees and shrubs. The moments were passing—officers and men growing impatient. At length it became certain that the fuse had gone out, and the question was, what shall be done? A lieutenant and sergeant of the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania, one of them a Rhode Island man, volunteered to go in and ascertain the cause. Cautiously examining the fuse, they find where it had gone out. Cutting it and preparing to ignite it, the lieutenant computes the time it will take it to burn and the distance he has to go to escape the effect of the explosion. He sees that he has scarcely a chance of escape. His match is lighted, he looks at his watch and sees that it is half past four o'clock and knows that the mine must explode immediately or the whole plan is a failure. Calmly choosing the almost certain death to the failure of the project, he applies the match and as if to verify the old adage, "Fortune favors the brave," escapes unhurt.

Meanwhile General Meade, a mile to the rear,



comfortably bestowed in his quarters, becoming impatient at the delay, and ignorant of its cause, grows irritable, and at length, at half past four, orders the charge to be made without regard to the explosion. Fortunately his order was not received till the explosion took place. At twenty minutes to five, I was standing with my watch in hand and noting the time, I remarked, "I guess the game's up for to-day," when all of a sudden the earth beneath my feet heaved as with the force of an earthquake, and the rebel fort in our front rose some five hundred feet in the air, with a heavy report as of distant thunder. Then followed a scene which beggars all description and of which language must fail to convey the faintest idea. In an instant a fort of six guns, with caissons, limbers and all their equipments, and a garrison of five hundred men, were blown into the air and fell in shapeless masses in every direction for hundreds of yards, and where but a moment before stood the fort with its garrison sleeping in almost perfect security, was a hole or crater two hundred feet long, sixty feet wide and twenty-five feet deep. Probably not a man of all that garrison escaped. At the instant



that we felt the jar of the explosion, the order, "FORWARD!" was shouted. A hundred pieces of artillery in our rear belched forth their thunders, while the shot and shell from them went screeching past us and just over our heads. And here let me pause a moment to pay a just tribute to the officer in command of those guns, and whom I notice before me to-night. For I cannot refrain from saying even in his presence, that had every part of the plan of the battle been executed as faithfully, as promptly, and as efficiently, as that assigned to Colonel Monroe, Chief of Artillery of the Ninth Corps, the issue of the battle must have been far different from what it was. The crash of artillery, mingling with the thunders of the explosion, the roar of musketry, the hoarse shouts of command, the cheers of the troops as they swept forward to the charge, their bayonets glistening in the rays of the rising sun, with the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying, combined to make a scene such as Milton in his description of the fierce combat on the battlements of heaven, when the apostate angels were cast thence, but faintly portrays, and which no one who witnessed it can ever forget.



It had been intended that General Ledlie's division should charge first, but General Griffin, who had formed his brigade—the first of General Potter's division—directly in front of the fort, having been called away just at the moment of the explosion, Colonel White, who had instructions from General Griffin to take the brigade in in case the explosion occurred before his return, not being familiar with the details of the plan, gave the order "FORWARD!" as soon as he felt the explosion, and so it happened that we were the first to enter the crater made by the explosion, the colors of my regiment being the first planted on the ruins of the fort, almost before the dirt had ceased falling. Regiment after regiment followed us, but the enemy, at first panic stricken, quickly rallied and begun at once to pour in upon us a terrific fire, both of artillery and infantry, to avoid which the later regiments, instead of passing directly over the works at this point, as was intended, piled into the crater after us. Quickly rallying, we passed beyond the crater, and sweeping down the works to the right and left, carried them for some two hundred yards in either direction, and



then forward and attempted to pass on to the crest of Cemetery Hill, as directed in General Meade's orders, but the different regiments had already suffered terribly in the charge. The whole of the three white divisions had been sent in, no support came to our relief, and, slowly and sadly disputing every inch of ground, we were forced back towards the crater. Time was passing but it brought us no relief until about nine o'clock, when the Fourth Division came in with all the impetuosity of new troops, cheering wildly, and for a moment it seemed as though the tide of battle would turn, and, if supported, we would carry the hill. But our hope was short lived, for though we rallied again and again, each time we were forced back at the point of the bayonet, towards the crater and finally into it. I never saw men fight better than the colored division, but they came too late to avail us.

I saw instances of individual bravery there that were never excelled upon any field. I noticed in particular the intrepidity of one private soldier, to whom God had given a dark skin but a brave heart and purpose, as well as a powerful physique. While



the enemy were forcing us back he came to the front, and calmly loading his rifle, waited till the enemy rallied to another charge upon us and until within a few feet of us, when, deliberately stepping over the breastworks that separated us, he shot the foremost rebel, then clubbing his musket he dispatched the two next with its butt, and breaking it at the second blow, with a look of disgust he threw it away and came back amid a shower of bullets, unharmed.

But all this bravery could avail nothing, for the enemy had had time to send reinforcements to the threatened line and the day was lost. Upon our return to the crater, a fearful sight met us. It had become nearly filled with the wounded, the dead and the dying, to such an extent that many were trampled to death who were otherwise unharmed. Vainly we attempted to hold the crater till night fall, so that we could escape under cover of the darkness. About two o'clock in the afternoon the enemy charged over into the crater and all that remained were taken prisoners. While in the crater occurred another instance of daring and self-forgetfulness, which I witnessed, and which is described by General Griffin, whose words I quote :



"On another occasion, at the battle of the Mine, when it was found impossible to succeed in the attempt to break the rebel line, our troops who held the crater were ordered by General Grant to retreat. Shot and shell and musket balls rained down upon those troops with fearful destructiveness. The enemy also had a cross fire on the open field over which they must retreat back to our lines, and could bring so many guns to bear upon that point as to make it almost sure death to any one who should attempt to pass over that ground. The day was exceedingly hot. Our poor boys were lying there in the burning sand upon which a July sun was shining with all the power of its vertical rays. Many of the wounded had crawled in there to avoid the shot, only to be exposed to the terrible bombs which fell in scores and exploded among them, often tearing them to pieces in the most horrible manner. All were suffering agonies of thirst, and the wounded were absolutely dying for the want of water. While lying there in that condition, waiting for our artillery to open and draw the enemy's fire so that the wounded might be saved and the retreat made with greater safety and with less loss, soldiers would come to their commanding officers and ask leave to go to the rear for water—to pass through that terrific shower of bullets and cannon shot and bring back water for the poor suffering boys around them. The reply would be, 'Yes, take as many canteens as you can well carry and go, and bring us water'—given more with the hope of saving *that soldier* from being captured where he was, and giving him a chance to run for his life, than with any expectation of seeing him return; for the probability at that time was that nearly all would be either captured or



killed, and it was thought too much to expect of any soldier that he would voluntarily pass twice through almost certain death—after having once escaped. Soldier after soldier came with the same request and was answered in the same manner, and quickly gathering up his load of canteens, started on his perilous journey—some to pass safely over and some to fall by the way. In due time one of them was seen clambering over our lines below, loaded down with well-filled canteens of cool water. What shouts and hurrahs from those parched throats greeted the brave fellow as he dashed toward us through the leaden hail. What blessings he received as he came among us and distributed the priceless beverage to those wounded men dying of thirst. Presently another of those heroes comes over the parapet with his burden of canteens. He, too, starts to join us with all the speed of which he is capable, but ere he has passed half way across that deadly field, he throws up his arms and goes down with the unmistakable *thud* of death. Quick as thought a young soldier dashes out from among us, rushes across the field, and seizing the canteens from the body of the fallen man, starts back to join us, but is shot down ere he has made a dozen yards. But see! He is up again, with indomitable pluck, and comes in with his precious freight only slightly wounded. And the shouts rise louder than ever for his gallant exploit. Then another comes over the parapet and succeeds in reaching us. Another attempts it and falls. And so on, until I believe every one of those noble fellows returned with his gallons of water, or fell in the attempt. It was to me the most striking exhibition of heroism and true courage that I saw during the whole war."



As we were forced to yield the crater, about a dozen of us climbed over the edge and took refuge in the angle formed by the upheaved earth and the breastworks, where we remained for an hour, the enemy upon one side and we upon the other, neither side daring to raise their heads. Among the number were General Griffin, of New Hampshire, General Hartranft, (now Governor of Pennsylvania,) and General Bartlett, of Massachusetts. The latter had attracted my attention particularly in the charge, as he had lost a leg at Bull Run and now led his men into the fight on a cork leg, carrying no sword or equipments, but simply a rattan walking stick, and was conspicuous in the front of the charge. Deliberately we discussed the choice between remaining and being taken prisoners, or almost certain death in retreat. Choosing the latter, we all started at once except General Bartlett, who could not run, and a few of us escaped but more fell by the way.

Thus ended in failure what promised to be one of the most successful battles of the war, and which must ever be ranked among the lost opportunities of the struggle. I have not time had I the wish, to



discuss the question of who was to blame for the failure or what were its causes. The great defect was in the lack of support, which was at hand in abundance had General Meade seen fit to have allowed it to be used. Certain it is that the failure should not be attributed to General Burnside, for no one could have accomplished more with the troops at his disposal. The loss in the Ninth Corps, was over four thousand, more than a fourth of its whole number, showing with what desperation they fought. General Meade, ever jealous of General Burnside, and incapable of appreciating his nobility of character, cast upon him all the responsibility of the failure, and the result was his retirement from the command of the Ninth Corps and from active service. But when true merit and meritorious service, though from modesty unclaimed, is fully appreciated, the name of Burnside will stand far above that of many of those who from motives of jealousy and meanness defamed him.

Permit me, though not pertinent to this paper, to state a fact I think generally unknown in regard to General Sherman's March to the Sea, and for which



he has received and is entitled to such meeds of praise, and that is, that the first man to suggest and plan that march was General Burnside. After the capture of Knoxville by General Burnside in 1873, he sent to General Halleck a dispatch, submitting three plans for his future movements, the last of which was ;—I quote the official record :—

“To move on the south side of the Tennessee, through Athens, Columbus and Benton, past the right flank of the enemy, sending a body of cavalry along the railroad on its west side to threaten the enemy’s flank and cover the movements of the main body, which, consisting of seven thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry, will move rapidly down the line of the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad, to Dalton, destroying the enemy’s communications, sending a cavalry force to Rome to destroy the machine works and powder mills at that place, the main body moving rapidly on the direct road to Atlanta, the railroad centre, and there entirely destroying the enemy’s communications, breaking up the depots, etc., thence moving to some point on the coast, where cover can be obtained, as shall be agreed upon with you. It is proposed to take no trains but to live upon the supplies at the enemy’s depots, destroying such as we do not use. If followed by the enemy, as we undoubtedly shall be, Rosencrans will be relieved and enabled to advance, and from the celerity of our movements and the destruction of bridges, etc., in our rear, the chance of escaping material injury



from pursuit are in our favor. Our chief loss would probably be in stragglers. I am in favor of the last plan."

To the above dispatch General Halleck replied under date of October second :—

"The purport of all your instructions has been that you should hold your point near the upper end of the valley and with all your available force move to the assistance of Rosencrans. Since the battle of Chicamauga and the reduction of our force to paper, you have been repeatedly told that it would be dangerous to form a connection on the south side of the Tennessee river and consequently that you ought to march on the north side. Rosencrans has now telegraphed to you that it is not necessary to join him at Chattanooga, but only to move to such a position that you can go to his assistance should he require it. You are in direct communication with Rosencrans and can learn his condition and wants sooner than I can. Distant expeditions into Georgia are not now contemplated. The object is to hold East Tennessee by forcing the enemy south of the mountains and closing the passes against his return."

After we were drawn back to our old line we were forcibly reminded of the cruelties of war, and our enemy's hate, by the following circumstances. We had left upon the slope between the lines a large number of dead and wounded. A flag of truce was immediately sent out requesting permis-



sion to bring off the wounded and to bury our dead, which was refused; and for two days the wounded lay exposed to the intense heat of the mid-summer sun without food or water, as targets for rebel bullets, and no opportunity to shoot one of the wounded was allowed to pass unimproved. Even those who were able to move and had crawled close up to the rebel line of works, were driven out by tossing among them bunches of cartridges with a slow match attached, that they might more easily become victims of rebel hate. When the permission was finally granted two days after the battle, we buried the dead but found only about a dozen wounded living upon the field.

Is it strange that we who witnessed scenes like these should be slow to forget them, and while we cherish no revenge, should demand that those who attempted to destroy the government, and practiced these barbarities on the field, and starved our soldiers in prison pens, should show works meet for repentance before we again commit to their hands the control of the government. Is it strange either that we should cherish with a love that will never forget,



those who, living or dead to day, stood side by side  
with us amid scenes like these; or that we cherish  
with a love amounting almost to reverence, the land  
drenched with and saved by such precious blood; or  
shall say of it to-night—

Oh! Beautiful! My Country! ours once more!

Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair

O'er such sweet brows as never others wore,

And letting thy set lips,

Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,

The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,

What words divine of lover or of poet,

Could tell our love and make thee know it?

Among the Nations bright beyond compare!

What were our lives without thee?

What all our lives to save thee?

We reck not what we gave thee,

We will not dare to doubt thee,

But ask whatever else, and we will dare!

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